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“A Goodbye Lightly Said”

A Critical Approach to Roland Leighton´s Poetry

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with a Translation of his Poems into Spanish

Abstract

The present MA dissertation aims at exploring and vindicating the figure and work of a talented British young man, the poet and soldier Roland Aubrey Leighton, who died of wounds at the age of twenty in the First World War.

This project has four main parts. The first one consists of an Introduction to the most relevant features of the Public School System at the beginning of 20th century England, before and during the Great War. Its idealised values of manliness and heroism are studied for an understanding of the direct effect they had on young boys of the poet´s generation. This part also includes an introductory section on Roland Leighton´s life: the Leighton´s household at London and Lowestoft, Roland´s academic background at Uppingham´s Public School, as well as his relationship with Vera Brittain and his own experiences during the war at the Western Front in France.

In the second part of the essay, Roland Leighton´s poetry is examined in depth. From his early poems written when he was still at school, some of them published at Uppingham´s *The School Magazine*, to his love poems to Vera and the ones he wrote at the front, to poetic fragments. This analysis is, therefore, divided into the following sections: "Juvenilia", "Love & War Poems" and "Fragmentary Poems & Vale". This critical approach especially takes into account some of his own personal thoughts as made manifest in his correspondence with Vera, family and friends, as well as his readings and some of Roland´s other Uppingham´s writings.

The next and third part of the study is the Conclusion, that aims to sum up the most characteristic features that were found in Roland´s poetry: contemplation, the sense of the pictorial, nature as an escape from reality, the coexistence of the romantic

tradition and a modernist attraction to the sensorial, the tendency to a dialogical form, aesthetic realism, etc. On the other hand, some of Roland´s literary influences are addressed: from Greek and Latin classics, to English Romanticism or a novelist such as Olive Schreiner and such diverse poets as Henry Newbolt, W.E.Henley, Paul Verlaine or Leighton´s contemporary and well-known war poet, Rupert Brooke.

The last part of the project consists of an Appendix with my translations of Roland´s poems into Spanish. It is presented in a bilingual version and is preceeded by a translator´s note. This last part of the essay is followed by a selection of some reproductions of manuscripts and photographs to illustrate Roland´s work and life, and aims at adding a visual counterpart, which will contribute to a more complete perspective on the poet.

Keywords: Roland Leighton, Great War, War Poetry, Decadentism, Modernism

Resumo

A presente dissertação de Mestrado visa explorar e validar a figura e a obra de um jovem britânico talentoso, o poeta e soldado Roland Aubrey Leighton, que morreu de ferimentos na Primeira Guerra Mundial, aos vinte anos.

Este projeto contempla quatro partes principais. A primeira consiste numa Introdução às características mais relevantes do sistema das Public Schools na Inglaterra do início do séc. XX, antes e durante a Primeira Guerra Mundial. Observámos o fenómeno da idealização dos valores da virilidade e do heroísmo de modo a compreender os efeitos que produziram nos jovens da geração do poeta. Esta parte inclui também uma secção introdutória sobre a vida de Roland Leighton: o contexto familiar dos Leighton em Londres e em Lowestoft, a formação académica de Roland na Public School de Uppingham, bem como a sua relação com Vera Brittain e as posteriores experiências durante a guerra, na Frente Ocidental em França.

A segunda parte deste trabalho explora em profundidade a poesia de Roland Leighton: desde os poemas escritos quando ainda se encontrava em Uppingham (alguns dos quais publicados em *The School Magazine* de Uppingham), aos poemas de amor dedicados a Vera, aos escritos durante a guerra e até aos fragmentos de poemas que deixou. Por isso, esta secção divide-se nas seguintes subpartes: "Juvenília", "Poemas de amor e de guerra" e "Vale e outros fragmentos". A abordagem crítica toma em consideração pensamentos do poeta, tais como se manifestam na correspondência trocada com Vera, com a família e com os amigos, e ainda contempla as suas leituras e alguns dos escritos não-poéticos produzidos em Uppingham.

A parte seguinte deste estudo corresponde à Conclusão que visa resumir as características mais marcantes encontradas na poesia de Leighton: contemplação, o sentido do pictórico, a natureza como escape à realidade, a coexistência da tradição romântica e da atracção modernista pelo sensorial, a tendência para uma estrutura dialógica, realismo estético, etc. Por outro lado, consideram-se ainda algumas das influências literárias sofridas pelo poeta: dos clássicos greco-romanos ao Romantismo inglês ou a romancistas como Olive Schreiner, a poetas tão diversos como Henry Newbolt, W.E.Henley, Paul Verlaine ou o contemporâneo de Leighton, o famoso poeta da guerra, Rupert Brooke.

A parte final do projecto consiste num anexo com as minhas traduções para castelhano dos poemas de Roland Leighton, apresentados em versão bilingue. Esta parte final é precedida duma nota da tradutora. Além disso, segue-se uma selecção de reproduções de alguns manuscritos e fotografias, visando ilustrar a vida e a obra do poeta, por meio de documentação visual que se espera contribua para dar do jovem autor uma perspectiva mais completa.

Palavras-chave: Roland Leighton, Primeira Guerra Mundial, Poesia de Guerra, Decadentismo, Modernismo

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I also wish to thank Jerry Rudman, archivist of Uppingham School, for providing me access to the issues of *The School Magazine*, as well as to the photographs of Roland that have been preserved from his school days.

Special thanks to Ben Clark, for his kind help and assessment during the revision of the present translation of Leighton´s poems into Spanish.

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Thanks to my mother and my sister, who have helped me stand on my feet, for their endless patience and support throughout the writing of this dissertation.

And to my father, the one who taught me the light of words.

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above the battle´s fury

clouds and trees and grass.

William Carlos Williams

Introduction

The first time I came across Leighton´s poems - almost two years ago - was thanks to the film *Testament of Youth* (2015) directed by James Kent, who makes an adaptation of the autobiographical novel written by Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (1933). Three Leighton´s poems ("Nachklang", "Violets" and "Hédauville") are recited voice-over by Kit Harington, who plays Leighton´s role in the film.

I was deeply touched by these poems and so I decided to look for whatever Leighton´s poetical material had been preserved. This way, I found out that, apart from the scarce quantity of poems by Leighton, there was scarcely any material written about his work. But it was in the The First World War Poetry Digital Archive from Oxford University that I could finally have access to the majority of his poems and to some manuscripts.

For six months I tried to get in touch with anybody who could provide me any kind of more specialized information about Leighton, but it was not until the New Year of 2017 that I got in touch with the poet´s nephew, David Leighton, 86 years old, whom I had the great opportunity of personally meeting, together with his wife Vanessa, some months later in London (in March, 2017).

The present essay derives from the conviction that Leighton´s work, despite its brevity and the fact that it was still in full development (he died when he was only 20 years old), deserves a common space where it can be shared. His poems, not only hold truth and beauty, but some of them also highlight a historic crucial moment for literature and, particularly, for modern poetry.

All in all, the present dissertation constitutes the first critical academic study carried out so far on Roland Leighton´s poetry, and includes as well as a selection and the corresponding translation of Leighton´s poems into Spanish that conclude it.

Primary Sources

Regarding the primary sources upon which this work has been based, we can mention: firstly, The First World War Poetry Digital Archive from the University of Oxford, that allowed me to have access to many of the poems written by Leighton, together with the manuscripts of his poems "Violets", "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz", "Triolet" and a part of "The Crescent and the Cross".

Another essential source for this dissertation has been the booklet *Poems,* privately published in 1981 by David Leighton, Leighton´s nephew, as it contains a selection of Leighton´s poems, biographical details of the poet, a photograph of Ploegsteert Wood taken by the poet and the fragment "Dust, only dust" that was not preserved in the archive mentioned above. Besides, I want to mention that this booklet has been a key reference at the time of carrying out the present dissertation of Leighton´s work.

Vera Brittain´s digital archive from McMaster University (Canada) that holds Brittain´s transcription of Leighton´s poetry notebook that she titled "Poems discovered in a notebook 18 months after his death" was also an invaluable source. This document holds an extraordinary value as it has given me access to all Leighton´s poems that have been preserved. Besides, thanks to this archive, I have been able to find out many of the dates when the poems were written. It also contains the transcription of some poetic quotes and poems by other authors that Leighton noted down in his notebook. Unfortunately, as I only had access to this document at the point of submitting this

dissertation I could not analyse the new found poems and fragments written by Leighton: "You would have granted all that e´er you had"[1], "I came and found and loved you then"[2] and "For I shall be born in a brothel"[3].

The book entitled *Letters from a lost generation* (2008), edited by Alan Bishop and Mark Bostridge, has allowed me to count on a varied selection of letters, not only from the correspondence between Leighton and Vera, but also from the correspondence among their circle of friends, as is the case of Edward Brittain, Victor Richardson, Geoffrey Thurlow, and where we can find comments, quotations and references to various of Leighton´s poems, particularly after his death. Moreover, this book has a very well documented introduction about the historic context in which the Great War broke out and the principles that were spread by the public schools at the time as the one Leighton attended.

Finally, The Uppingham School Heritage Archives online, that preserves *The School Magazine* issues in which Leighton published his first poems and other texts, was also very important for my research. For Leighton was the editor of the school magazine during his last academic year, 1913-1914. It was thanks to these archives that I have been able to observe with detail Leighton´s contribution to the academic life at his school as well as to the literary life of Uppingham: debates in which he participated, diplomas of works carried out by him, mentions and prizes that were awarded to him…

[1] The fragment reads: You would have granted all that e´er you had/ To Galahad;/ But now – will tears mark out a diary-spit/ For Lancelot?

[2] The full poem is as follows: I came and found and loved you then/ In that pain-sweetened long ago,/ Ere my unknowing heart´s pure glow/ Had wakened to the world of men./ Thinking that you and I were both/ In one cold loveless world the same,/ You bent soft rose-lips to enjoy/ The chaster kisses of a boy/ Not thought to fan so great a flame.

[3] The full text reads: For I shall be born in a brothel/ And you will be born on a throne. / With averted face/ Fate allots each place/ And we never may ask for our own. / And none of us dares to murmur/ And none of us mutters a cry, / Though we know to well/ What a living Hell/ Some must suffer before they die. / For some of the Earth is Heaven/ And most of the earth is Hell/ And the mocking stars/ Look through Heaven´s bars/ And smile "God has made it well."

In these archives I have also been able to compare the version of Roland Leighton´s poems published in the Uppingham magazine *The School Magazine* ("Triolet", "L´Envoi", "Clair de Lune") with that published by David Leighton in 1981, with Vera´s transcriptions and the original manuscripts that are preserved. It was in this same archive that I could locate the very first text published by Leighton in the school magazine in June 1913: a text in prose about the Dutch city of Ymuiden titled "An Old Seaport Town", and to which I will refer in this work. And last, I had also access to various editorials written by Leighton during his position as editor of *The School Magazine,* during the academic year 1913-1914.

Secondary Sources and Methodology

As for the secondary sources used along the present work, the most important have been: *Testament of Youth* and *Chronicle of Youth: War Diary 1913-1917*, by Vera Brittain, for offering both a detailed and accurate account on Roland Leighton´s appearance, personality, intellect and poetry, while recording at the same time many excerpts of Leighton´s letters and conversations, as well as his views on war and his own account of his experience at the French Front.

Boy of My Heart by Marie Connor Leighton, Leighton´s mother, (published anonymously, in 1916, after Leighton´s death) offers the reader a very personal memoir of her son´s short life: travelling, anecdotes, family habits… It covers Leighton´s childhood and youth until his death, putting special emphasis on his personality, his literary ambitions and the education he received. Some extracts from letters that Leighton sent to his mother are particularly relevant in this book as well as references to authors and fragments of poems his mother used to read or recite to him as a child and which, together with his formal education in Uppingham, would stress his heroic vision

of the war and the subsequent conflict that would take place between this ideal and the real experience of the poet at the Front.

Tempestuous Petticoat: The Story of an Invincible Edwardian written by Leighton´s younger sister, the wood engraver artist Clare Leighton, offers great insight into the Leighton´s family life. The book portrays the bohemian literary atmosphere of St John´s Wood in London, where the Leighton´s lived until the First World War broke out, besides offering a vivid account of how Roland and his younger siblings, Clare and Evelyn, were raised, together with all the changes the Leighton family had to face during and after the war.

The greatest challenge of this dissertation has been, without any doubt, the lack of critical approaches written on Leighton´s work, as I had to deal mainly with the poetic corpus without any sort of critical support. Therefore, the use of biographical sources is justified by the lack of critical studies as well as by the need to contextualize the poet in order better to understand his work. However, the methodology I have followed in the present dissertation has been a close reading of the poems, paying careful attention to the language, metaphors and other rhetorical devices, as well as aspects of metrics and prosody. This methodology somehow helps to correct any possible and impertinent biographical interference. I also pursued a comparative approach, seeking connections between poems and poets of different periods and national spaces in order to identify and better characterize influences as well as to contextualize Leighton´s poetry in a broader cultural space.

Among the works that include critical references to poems written by Leighton, we can find *Strange Meetings: The poets of the Great War,* by Harry Rickett (2010), which includes a chapter dedicated to the relationship between Brittain and Leighton

viewed mainly from the perspective of their correspondence and some of their poetry. Rickett also points out that Leighton´s poem "Hédauville" (1915) is an imitation in stanza form and subject matter of Rupert Brooke´s poem "The Chilterns" (1913). Rickett´s chapter allowed me to examine and take into account in my analysis the possible influence of Brooke´s poetry on Leighton´s, not only in the poem "Hédauville" but also in other poems that Leighton wrote in the front.

Vera Brittain´s Biography: A life, published by Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge (2001) devotes its second chapter to Roland Leighton (50-97). Apart from including some detailed and well documented biographical information on the poet, it explores the irony of the war surroundings described in several of Leighton´s letters, where the pastoral elements of the landscape co-existed with the on-going destruction of the war. Some of these observations have allowed me to have a better understanding of the poet´s experience of this contradictory reality and how it affected his own work and his early heroic conception of war.

Andrea Christine Mckenzie´s thesis titled "Witnesses to War: Discourse and Community in the Correspondence of Vera Brittain, Roland Leighton, Edward Brittain, Geoffrey Thurlow and Victor Richardson, 1914-1918" (University of Waterloo, Canada, 2000) dedicates a few pages to Leighton´s poem "Violets" (81-83) making some interesting points on the poem, approached mainly from the perspective of his correspondence.

Leighton´s poems "In the Rose Garden" and "Vale" are mentioned in Sarah Montin´s article "Not Flowers for poet´s tearful foolings. First World War Poetry, flowers and the Pastoral Failure", where a few lines by Leighton are quoted as an

example of the use of flowers associated with songs and poetry. Surprisingly, Leighton´s poem "Violets" is not mentioned in Montin´s essay.

The most recent work that includes several of Leighton´s poems is the MA thesis written by Florine Morgane de Keyser titled "´There Was Only One Course left to Tell my own Fairly Typical Story as Truthfully as I Could against the Larger Background´. "An Intertextual Analysis of Vera Brittain´s *Testament of Youth*" (Ghent University, 2016). This dissertation explores how Brittain meaningfully uses Leighton´s poems as a way of introducing the chapters of her own autobiographic novel, *Testament of Youth*. Following the order in which they appear in Brittain´s novel, Leighton´s poems "In the Rose-Garden", "Violets", "Triolet", "Roundel", "Hédauville" are entirely quoted in de Keyser´s work. De Keyser establishes some interesting parallelisms between Leighton´s poems "Roundel: Vera Speaks" and "Hédauville" and those written by Brittain after his death, "Roundel: Died of Wounds" and "Perhaps". In some cases, de Keyser adds a few comments on Leighton´s poems, but almost always through Brittain´s perspective.

Most of Leighton´s poems have been preserved thanks to Vera Brittain, who included a great number of them in *Testament of Youth*. Besides, some fragments and poems, written in the notebook Leighton took to the front, have also survived, thanks to the fact that she transcribed them.

However, this fact has probably not helped the poetic work of Leighton itself to be explored in depth nor analysed as a whole; on the contrary, it has been seen in a collateral way through Brittain´s work. Thus, what can be said in terms of the poet´s critical reception is that there have been mostly incidental approaches to his work through Vera.

Structure

The present dissertation is divided into four main parts. The first one consists of the present Introduction that includes an explanation of the main sources and methodology for this work, its structure and criteria. Another important aim for this section is to introduce the most relevant aspects of Leighton´s life: the Leighton´s literary household at London and Lowestoft, his academic background at Uppingham Public School, his relationship with Vera Brittain and his own war experiences at the Western Front in France. This introductory part also includes a section on the most relevant features of the Public School System at the beginning of 20th century England, before and during the Great War. Its idealised values of manliness and heroism are alluded to for an understanding of the direct effect they had on young boys of the poet´s generation and on the poet himself.

The second part of this essay, and the most important, consists of a critical analysis of Leighton´s poetical work, divided into three different sections, each one preceded by a title. The first section, "Juvenilia", includes the first poems written by Leighton during his school days in Uppingham, dated between 1913 and 1914, some of which were published in the magazine *The School Magazine*. This section, therefore, includes the framework for and the analysis of his poems "L´Envoi", "Triolet", "Clair de Lune" (published in Uppingham´s magazine), alongside "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz" and "The Crescent and the Cross", which were not published in the school magazine, however, but that also belong to this first stage.

The following section, headed by the title "Love and War Poems", compiles and analyses the poems written by Leighton between 1914 and 1915: the love poems which he dedicated to Vera Brittain as well as those he wrote at the French front: "In the Rose

Garden", "Nachklang", "Roundel", "Violets", "Ploegsteert" and "Hédauville". Only in some of these poems is it possible to separate the love theme from the war one. Others clearly interweave both thematic strands.

The last section of my critical approach, titled "Vale and Other Fragments", collects and analyses some of Leighton´s fragments that have been preserved, such as "Goodbye" (1914) and "Dust, only dust". This last poem appears undated, but it was probably written by Leighton at the front in 1915.

This same section also includes the poem "Vale", written by Leighton in May 1914. It has not been included in the "Juvenilia" section, however, because, as I understand it, "Vale" combines some of the best features of Leighton´s poetry, as well as offering a perfect closure for this part of my work.

The third part of the study is the Conclusion, which aims to sum up the most characteristic features found in Leighton´s poetry: contemplation, the sense of the pictorial, nature as an escape from reality, the coexistence of the romantic tradition and a modernist attraction to the sensorial, the tendency to a dialogical form, aesthetic realism, etc. On the other hand, some of Leighton´s literary influences are summarised in the Conclusion, although they have been addressed in relation to some specific poems. From the Greek and Latin classics, to English Romanticism or a novelist such as Olive Schreiner and such diverse poets as Henry Newbolt, W. E. Henley, Paul Verlaine, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Laurence Hope, Oscar Wilde or Leighton´s contemporary and well-known war poet Rupert Brooke.

The fourth and last part of this project consists of an Appendix with my annotated translations of most of Leighton´s poems into Spanish. These translations are presented in a bilingual version and are preceded by a translator´s note. This last part of

the essay is followed by a selection of photographs and a manuscript of one of his poems in order to illustrate Leighton´s life and work, and aims at adding a visual counterpart, which will contribute to a more complete perspective on the poet.

Criteria

The choice for a thematic and chronological approach to this sequence of poems aims at offering an overview on Leighton´s vital and artistic development, taking as a reference and guide the booklet published by Leighton´s nephew, David Leighton, in 1981, and whose intention was to show the reader a coherent sequence that followed the life development as well as the ideological and psychological transformation of the poet.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention some differences between the poems studied in the present work and those published by David Leighton. On the one hand, we include here three more poems: "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz" (1914), "The Crescent and the Cross" (1914) and "Goodbye" (1914), for a more complete view of Leighton´s work. On the other hand, all the poems we analyse are presented according to a more precise chronological order, taking into account the exact date when they were written, with the exception of "Vale & Other Fragments", studied in the last section and to which I have previously alluded.

There are two more editing changes regarding the booklet published in 1981: the poem that was titled "Villanelle" is titled "Violets" in the present work, respecting the one that appeared in Leighton´s manuscript. The other change can be found in the sixth verse of the poem "Triolet", namely: "The great World-heart is sighing" in the edition of 1981, and which appears here as: "The deep World-heart is sighing", mantaining the adjective that appears in the original manuscript of the poem and in Uppingham´s *The*

School Magazine, December issue of 1913, where a poem by Leighton was published for the first time.

Introducing the man and the poet: Roland Aubrey Leighton (1895-1915)

Roland Aubrey Leighton was born in London on 27 March 1895. He was the adored and eldest son of Robert Leighton, a writer of boys' adventure stories, son of the famous Scottish poet Robert Leighton, and Marie Connor Leighton, a succesful romance novelist.

Roland´s father became the first Literary Editor of the *Daily Mail* in 1896 and occupied this position until 1899, while Roland´s mother wrote sensational melodramas for the *Northcliffe Press* and her serial stories appeared for many years in the newspapers *Mail* and *Answers.* Her writing largely supported the Leighton household, a fact, Roland claimed, hade made him a feminist.

Roland, therefore, grew up in a very active literary environment, in the artistic neighbourhood of St John´s Wood in London, where the Leightons lived until 1913. In her novel *Tempestuous Petticoat: The Story of an Invincible Edwardian* Roland´s younger sister, Clare Leighton, describes the bohemian atmosphere of St John´s Wood:

> Our house, which had the romantic name of Vallombrosa, was satisfactorily invisible from the road (…) These bosky gardens protected houses where pictures were really painted and books were actually written. Artists' models disappeared each morning into garden gates. Hansom cabs arrived each evening to convey celebrated actresses to West-End theatres. Wafted by the breeze from some open window came the sound of some Singer practising his part at Covent Garden.

Roland shared a very close and special bond with his mother Marie. Marie´s first child had died in infancy and she took particular care of Roland, almost to the point of neglecting her other younger children. His mother´s love for him stopped just short of idolatry.

From a very young age, Roland was taught French and was read poetry by his mother, who went to say good night to him in bed every night. She recited him poems by authors such as Henry Newbolt, Conan Doyle or Quiller Couch that glorify warfare and patriotism, which led Roland to know their lines by heart. Roland early developed a great interest in literature. At the age of only eleven, he printed twelve numbers of a monthly home magazine he called "The Vallombrosa Record" with a toy typewriter.

During his childhood and early teens Roland visited Holland, France, Germany and the heart of Russia with his parents.

From 1909 to 1914, he attended Uppingham Public School in Rutland, where he was an outstanding student. In his final academic year there, he was the Captain of his school house, The Lodge, Captain in Classics, Praepositor, President of the Union Society, Colour-Sergeant of Uppingham´s Officers´ Training Corps (OTC) and Editor of the school magazine. On the Speech Day, 11 July 1914, Roland broke the Uppingham record for school prizes and received the seven main ones, including those for English Essay, Latin Prose, Greek Prose, Latin Hexameters, Greek Epigram, etc. He was also awarded the prestigious Senior Open Classical Postmastership at Merton College in Oxford. A brilliant career was envisaged for him by his family and schoolmasters as a poet and diplomat, or perhaps as Editor of *The Times.*

Besides being the editor of Uppingham´s *The School Magazine* during his last academic year 1913-1914, he published some of his first poems there: "L´Envoi"

(1913), “Triolet” (1913) and “Clair de Lune” (1914), but also an article titled “An Old Seaport Town” (1913).

At Uppingham, he met those who became his closest friends: Edward Brittain and Victor Richardson. In April 1914, Edward invited him to stay over the Easter holidays at the Brittain´s house in Buxton and it was then that Leighton met Edward´s sister, Vera Brittain, the well-known pacifist and feminist writer. They both became very fond of each other and spent hours walking and discussing literature, feminism, philosophy and religion. They continued to see each other and kept an intimate correspondence.

Only a month after Roland finished school, the Great War was declared. Like so many of his generation, instead of continuing his studies at university, he volunteered for the army at the first opportunity. After several frustrated attempts to join the army due to his short-sightedness, Roland finally succeeded in enlisting as a second lieutenant in the 4th Norfolks in October 1914. During the upcoming months, however, he continued exhaustively to pursue being transferred to a frontline regiment and was eventually posted to France with the 7th Worcestershire Regiment in March 1915.

During his time at the front he exchanged a great number of letters with Vera, with whom he had fallen in love. In their letters they discussed British society, the war and literature and sometimes even exchanged poems.

For most of April Leighton´s battalion was based in Ploegsteert Wood, a few miles from the Franco-Belgian border, known coloquially among British trops as Plug Street Wood, close to the French town of Armentiéres. There Leighton wrote his poems “Violets” and “Ploegsteert”. In the middle of June his battalion began to move southwards into the Somme country.

In the summer, Leighton got his first leave and arrived in England on the 18th of August. He then travelled the following day with Vera to Lowestoft (Suffolk) where the Leighton family now lived in Heather Cliff, a house perched on the edge of a cliff. Vera spent the weekend with the Leightons and it was then that Roland and her became engaged. Vera, however, noticed a certain detachment and aloofness from Roland that weekend. He certainly must have felt an acute sense of dislocation during his leave.

On the 27th of August he arrived back at the front. During the following months, Roland´s letters to Vera became less frequent and in some of them he even seemed numb, cynical and distant. His short leave seemed to have had a serious effect on his state of mind. In a letter to Vera on the 18th of October he writes: "I am getting absorbed in my little world here. It is the only way to stifle boredom and regrets."

The gulf between the sentimentalized conception of the war to which his family and Vera still clung and Roland´s first-hand knowledge of the war might have also contributed to his growing detachment and dissilusionment.

In several of his letters from this period he condemns the romantic, heroic vision of war, rejecting his own earlier views and Rupert Brooke-style rhetoric he had once so fervently admired. Some of Leighton´s last poems are also tinged with the same bitter irony.

In November Roland was transferred to Hédauville for temporary duty in the trenches with the Somerset Light Infantry. There, he wrote his last known poem, "Hédauville". He then returned to his own regiment at Hébuterne in December and got permission for a Christmas leave from 24 to 31 December.

On the night of the 22nd of December 1915, Roland was ordered to get his men together to repair the wire in front of their trenches. At midnight, Roland went ahead to

inspect it and to see that all was safe before the rest followed. There was a bright moon and the Germans were only a hundred yards away. Roland was reaching the gap in a hedge on a concealed path which led to No Man´s Land when a machine-gun bullet hit him in the stomach.

Roland was brought back to the dressing-station at Louvencourt but was too weak to be operated on before morning. He died the following night, the 23rd of December 1915 at Louvencourt. He was 20 years old.

The English Public-School System

Uppingham School in Rutland, to which Leighton went from 1909 to 1914, had been transformed from an obscure county gramar school into a major public school embodying the `muscular Christian´ ideal heralded by the headmaster Edward Thring during the second half of the XIX century. Moreover, following R.B. Haldane´s Army Reforms of 1907, the Officer´s Training Corps (OTC) were introduced into public schools, such as Uppingham, as a gesture towards national preparedness for war. (*Cf*. Bishop and Bostridge, 3).

As we have previously mentioned, Leighton himself joined the Officers' Training Corps while he was studying at Uppingham. And, as Vera recalls in *Testament of Youth*, it was on Speech Day 1914 that the headmaster of Uppingham, Reverend Mackenzie, gave a speech to those young men, including Leighton, which ended with the quote from a Japanese General, Count Nogi-Be: "If a man can't serve his country he's better dead." (*TY*, 70)

Alan Bishop and Mark Bostridge talk about this militarist education in their Introduction to *Letters From a Lost Generation* (1998):

> The OTC provided the institutional mechanism for public school militarism. But a more complex web of cultural ideas and assumptions, some taken from the classics, some from popular fiction, some even developed through competitive sports on the playing fields, was instilled by schoolmasters in their pupils, and contributed to the generation of 1914's overwhelming willingness to march off in search of glory. [4]

In this respect, Roland, as many other boys of his generation, inherited an idealistic perspective on war, as we can clearly see in his letter to Vera, of the 29th of September, 1914, only a month after the war broke out:

> I don´t think in the circumstances I could easily bring myself to endure a secluded life of scholastic vegetation. It would seem a somewhat cowardly shirking of my obvious duty (…) I feel, however, that I am meant to take some active part in this war. It is to me a very fascinating thing – something, if often horrible, yet very ennobling and very beautiful, something whose elemental reality raises it above the reach of all cold theorising. You will call me a militarist. You may be right. (*LG*, 30)

The education the so-called English public schools of the time provided was very much behind spreading a very particular form of patriotism. As Roland Leighton´s nephew, David Leighton, explains in the foreword of Don Farr´s *None that go return:*

> Patriotism in the early 20th Century had acquired some ugly aspects, in particular, arrogance & belligerence. British citizens were still accepting, in their national anthem, a call to God to "arise, scatter our enemies and make them fall; confound their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks…" [5]

[4] Bishop, Alan, and Mark Bostridge. *Letters from a Lost Generation*. London: Virago Press, 2008, p.4. Hereafter cited in the text as *LG*.
[5] Farr, Don. (2010). *None that Go Return: Leighton, Brittain and Friends and the Lost Generation 1914-1918*. England: Helion & Company, p.2.

It was in this context that many young men like Leighton grew up:

> The "public schools" were not public, nor are they today; they are selective and fee-paying, and produce a large proportion of judges, senior military officers, Conservative politicians (…) Roland, like his fellows, grew up with a very high level of obligation, determination, sense of responsibility and aspiration for leadership. And of course, there was a huge Empire which had to be governed, policed, developed economically, and leaders were needed in large numbers…[6]

According to Peter Parker, in his book *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos,* there were two contrasting genres that contributed to the public school boy´s perspective about war: the study of the classics and the reading of boys' adventure stories. As Andrea Mackenzie´s states:

> Although these are not the only contributing factors to the enthusiasm for war and the wholesale eagerness of the 1914 volunteers- which Roland, Edward and Victor epitomize- they certainly helped to shape the expectations of war that the schoolboys turned soldiers looked forward to. For Roland, who took seven prizes on the July 1914 Uppingham Speech Day, six of them in the Classics, the version of the Classics which he studied at school would become what Parker calls "a binding agent which held together the various particles of an ethos". (*Mackenzie*, 86)

If we look through the long list of prizes given to Leighton on the Speech Day of July 1914, printed in Uppingham´s *The School Magazine* August Issue of 1914, we can notice not only the presence of the Classics but also that the chosen subjects are very much linked to an idealised vision of the battle.[7] Among all these prizes, Leighton was awarded the Greek Prose Composition Prize for *Pitt´s Orations: "Preparations for War with France."* and the Latin Hexameters Prize for *Cowper´s Heroism: "There was a time… ages can restore."*

[6] From private correspondence with David Leighton.

[7] Interestingly, Brittain depicts both Roland Leighton and Edward Brittain as medieval knights in her poems "To Monseigneur" and "That which remaineth", respectively. Both poems were published in her poetry book *Verses of a V.A.D.* (1918).

Furthermore, the Greek and Latin classics were modelled to reflect the Christian, heterosexual, self-sacrificial and manly virtues these public schools upheld (*Cf*. Parker, 99). We can also find the same combination of heroism and Christian values of self-sacrifice and selflessness in the revival of medieval chivalry that took place in Britain from the late 18th century until the 1914-18 war:

> Less obvious, but of equal if not greater interest is the part which the revival of chivalry played in creating ideals of behaviour, by which all gentlemen were influenced, even if they did not consciously realise it. (…) The result was the chivalrous gentleman of Victorian and Edwardian days, who can be watched at work from the public schools to the Boy Scouts, and from Toynbee Hall to the outposts of the British Empire.[8]

Values such as heroism, generosity, fearlessnes, fairness, pureness of heart or self-sacrifice can be seen depicted in Brittain´s poem dedicated to Leighton, "To Monseigneur", written in November 1915, a month before his death. In the poem, Leighton is called "Roland de Roncesvalles" and depicted as a medieval knight, just as the lyrical subject of the poem represents the voice of a medieval lady: "He would not be my pure and stainless knight/ Of heart without reproach or hint of fear".[9]

On the other hand, boys' adventure stories published in periodicals of the time, such as *The Boys Own Paper (BOP)* and *Chums,* together with books from authors like Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, Henry Newbolt (whose poems Marie Leighton read to Roland since a very young age) or Robert Louis Stevenson contributed to the image of the young soldier and were often given as school prizes. We must take into account that Stevenson´s novel *Treasure Island* was accepted for serial publication by Roland´s father, Robert Leighton, who became the first literary editor of Northcliffe´s *Daily Mail*

[8] Girouard, Mark. *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981.
[9] Brittain, Vera. Brittain, Vera. (1918). *Verses of a V.A.D*. London: Erskine MacDonald, p.18.

in 1896 and who was himself an author of adventure stories for boys. As Mackenzie rightly points out:

> A brief glance through the bound volume of the *Boy´s Own Paper* for 1905-06, a year or two before the three boys went to Uppingham [Roland, Edward and Victor], shows the typical story genres: the travel adventure, the school story, the sports story, the war story. All plunge into action within the first page, and, true to the serial type, end each segment with a cliffhanger. The heroes are fearless, using breezy language to cover up any wavering emotions, and always live up to the "manly" virtues extolled by the public schools. Serials in papers such as *Chums* tended to follow the same pattern. Robert Leighton´s tales were often set into other countries, such as Canada, and also featured young heroes who battled the elements and the Indians, in turn. Adventure, in all these tales, was eagerly sought after as experience; although death ocurred, it was noble for any on the "good" side, and deserved for any on the villainous side.
>
> (*Mackenzie*, 88)

To fight for their country was considered to be part of these young men´s duties. The values of militarism -patriotism, the conception of war as something glorious, the figure of the soldier as a hero- were all part of the education the youngsters underwent at the time. The military training they received at school, their reading of epic battles, together with a powerful campaign of political propaganda not only contributed to push these youngsters to war but it also made them conceive war as a romantic and heroic entreprise.

In a letter Leighton wrote to Vera some months after the war had been declared, he expresses his feelings of anger, rage and shame for being in England waiting to be sent to the front:

> It is summer-but it is not war… It only makes me angry, angry with myself for being here, and with the others for being content to be here. When men whom I have once despised as effeminate are sent back wounded from the front, when nearly everyone I know is either going

or has gone, can I think of this with anything but rage and shame?

(*LG*, 55)

The education Leighton received in Uppingham stressed his heroic vision of the war and contributed to the subsequent deep conflict that would take place between this ideal and the real experience of the poet at the front -reflected in Leighton´s letters and in his own late poems- as will be made manifest in the critical analysis of his poems in this dissertation.

Four hundred and fifty Uppingham boys were killed during the Great War, one of the highest casualty rates of any of the UK's independent schools. Of those who had been school prefects with Leighton in 1914, only one quarter survived a further two years. [10]

[10] http://www.uppingham.co.uk/ww1-remembered-in-musical-tribute-to-the-fallen-of-uppingham-school

2. The Poetry of Roland Aubrey Leighton (1895-1915)

The criteria we have chosen to present the study of Leighton´s poetic work have been both the thematic and chronological. Therefore, we will find the following sections: Juvenilia (poems written at school, some of them published in Uppingham´s *The School Magazine*), Love & War Poems (dedicated to Vera Brittain and also those that were written at the front, in France) and Fragmentary Poems and Vale (a section devoted to his poem "Vale" and other fragments for reasons to be adduced later on).

As stated in the Introduction of this work, we have tried to respect the unifying thread, mainly chronological, that vertebrates the booklet titled *Poems*, privately published by Roland Leighton´s nephew, David Leighton, in 1981. However, the number of poems studied in the present essay is larger as it includes several other poems and fragments.

2.1. Juvenilia

In this section, we have included the first poems written by Roland when he was still at school. The majority of these ("L´Envoi", "Triolet" and "Claire de Lune") were published in Uppingham´s *The School Magazine*, in which Roland collaborated very actively, and whose editor was Roland himself during his last year at school (1914). He would also write a brief article for the journal, entitled "An old seaport town", in which he introduces the picturesque fishermen village of Ymuiden, near Lowestoft, where the Leightons had their family house, `Heather Cliff´. An allusion to this article will occur later on in this chapter.

2.1.1. "L´Envoi"

Only a turn of head,

A good-bye lightly said,

And you set out to tread

Your manlier road.

Both our Youth's paths once met;

And think not we forget

How great a brothers' debt

To you is owed.

Sweep onward; and though Fame

Shall aureole your name,

Remember whence you came

In Boyhood days.

And in life's darkening years

Look back on hopes and fears

Mingled with memory's tears

And blame and praise.

"L´Envoi" was the first poem that Roland published at school. It appeared in Uppingham´ *The School Magazine* in August, 1913. This first poetical contribution aimed to be a tribute to the older boys that were leaving school after graduating in 1913, just a year before Roland himself finished school.

Vera mentions this poem in *Testament of Youth*:

> Late one night the previous holidays, my mother, noticing the light still burning in Edward´s room, had gone up to see if anything was the matter… He was setting to music, he told her, a poem called "L´Envoi", which the Captain of his House had written for last summer´s school magazine…"[11]

Brittain´s novel, *Testament of Youth,* also includes a score of the musical setting made by her brother, Edward Brittain, who was one of Roland´s closest friends.

Marie Connor Leighton, Roland´s mother, also mentions this poem in her book *Boy of my heart*, dedicated to the memory of her son and published in 1916, a year after his death. [12]

Leighton´s poem is made up of four stanzas of four lines (three hexasyllable lines followed by a final tetrasyllable line), following the rhyme scheme: aaab cccb ddde fffe. The rhyme scheme supports the division and interpretation of the poem that we present here. The first part, composed by the first two stanzas, focuses on what is soon to become their past: their shared adolescence days; the second part, on the other hand, composed by the last two stanzas, anticipates a future that though hopefully bright will no doubt also involve suffering.

The poem reveals some of the values that were praised and preserved within the English public schools of the time: a sense of camaraderie ("how great a brother´s debt to you is owed"), an idea of masculinity ("and you set out to tread your manlier road") linked to the image of the epic hero, that extols the values of honor, bravery and glory ("and though Fame shall aureole your name")[13]. However, the poem is not only a

[11] Brittain, Vera, *Testament of Youth,* London: Orion Publishing Group, 2014, p. 62. Hereafter cited in the text as *TY*.
[12] See Leighton, Marie, *Boy of My Heart.* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916, pp.175-178.
[13] All of these explored in the introductory section of this dissertation titled The English Public School System (pp.24-29). Fore more information on the ethos of public schools in England see the books *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* by Peter Parker (London: Constable, 1987) and

farewell and a tribute to the schoolmates that were leaving school, but a tribute to their adolescent days and to the place where they had grown up together. Those "boyhood days" are represented as idealized and oppose to "life´s darkening years" that picture time and life as one gets older as more sombre.

It is almost as if the poem recalls the classic leitmotif of *tempus fugit*[14] and *collige virgo rosas*[15] when the lyrical subject encourages in lines 11-12: "remember whence you came/ in boyhood days" or in the last stanza of the poem: "and in life´s darkening years/ look back on hopes and fears/mingled with memory´s tears/ and blame and praise".

"L´Envoi", although written by Roland in 1913, two years before he went to the Front and a year before the Great War started, acquires a significant dramatic dimension when taken within the context of WWI with its prophetic tone, anticipating the very negative experience of the war and everything that it would mean for all these young men. They passed directly from school to the war and their youth was uprooted. Therefore, Leighton´s poem could also be read as a depiction of the departure from home to the front and the abrupt change this meant: "Only a turn of head/ a goodbye lightly said/ and you set out to tread/ your manlier road".

None That Go Return: Leighton, Brittain and Friends, and the Lost Generation 1914-1918 by Don Farr (Elion and Company, 2010).

[14] Latin phrase, usually translated into English as "time flies". The expression comes from line 284 of book 3 of Virgil's *Georgics*, where it appears as *fugit inreparabile tempus*: "it escapes, irretrievable time".

[15] Latin phrase that epitomizes *carpe diem* and can be translated into English as "gather, girl, roses." The expression comes from Ausonio´s *De rosis nascentibus*: "Collige, virgo, rosas, dum flos novus, et nova pubes, et memor esto aevum sic properare tuum".

From this perspective, these lines would not only reflect the goodbyes and everything that remains untold in them, but also the obligation felt by so many young men to join the army. [16]

Therefore, the title "L´Envoi" (`sent´) would acquire a darker meaning alluding to all those boys who were sent to the front and signed and volunteered as soon as they could in order to fight for their country, as they thought it was their duty to "*tread*" their "*manlier road"*. At the same time, the first two lines of the poem would undoubtedly reflect how very eager and unconscious they were: "Only a turn of head/ a goodbye lightly said".

On the other hand, the reference to fame that can be found in the poem: "and though Fame/ shall aureole your name" would deeply resonate with the idea of death in war, seen as something glorious in Rupert Brooke´s famous sonnets of 1914: "He leaves a white/ Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance, /A width, a shining peace, under the night" (War Sonnet IV: "The Dead").

Finally, the last stanza of "L´Envoi" also connects with Leighton´s later poem "Ploegsteert", written in April 1915, while he was at the front in France. The lines "And in life´s darkening years/ look back on hopes and fears/ mingled with memory´s tears/ and blame and praise" seems to match the lines in "Ploegsteert", where the lyrical subject echoes a childhood that strongly contrasts with the war scenario: "Love have I known, and dawn and gold of day-time/ And winds and songs and all the joys that are/ Known once, and as a child that tires with play-time/ Leaped from them to the elemental dust of War".

[16] See the introductory section The English Public School System (pp.24-29).

The nostalgic evocation of a contrast between childhood´s past and present harsh experiences is a common trait in both these poems.

2.1.2. "Triolet"

There´s a sob on the sea
And the Old Year is dying.
Borne on night wings to me
There´s a sob on the sea,
And for what could not be
The deep World's Heart is sighing.
There´s a sob on the sea,
And the Old Year is dying.

Leighton´s poem "Triolet" is another of his poems to appear in Uppingham´s *The School Magazine* December Issue of 1913. This short poem of only eight lines, follows the traditional French scheme of ´Rondel Simple´.[17] The metre of the poem is an anapestic dimeter and the length of the lines is hexasyllable. It is divided into 3 stanzas and presents the following rhyme scheme: ab aa abab.

The poem opens and closes with the same lines: "There´s a sob on the sea/ and the Old Year is dying/", providing a circular structure to the composition. This poetic device, called parallelism, was a particularly frequent feature in medieval poetry of the

[17] A poem that had its originis in France during the early 16th century. It consisted of ten or thirteen lines with only two rhymes throughout and with the opening words used twice as a refrain.

Romance languages (carols, "cantigas"). The constant reiteration of the lines "There´s a sob on the sea" (lines 1, 4 and 7) and "And the Old Year is dying" (lines 2 and 8) give more intensity and nostalgia to the feeling of finality, of something coming to an end that the lyrical subject is experiencing: something that is passing away, whose inexorable end is approaching.

On the other hand, its use of the present continuous "is dying", "is sighing" is particularly significant. As Morgane De Keyser mentions in her essay "An Intertextual Analysis of Vera Brittain´s *Testament of Youth*": "This means that the "dying" is still going on and not a concluded event as we would expect with death. The emphasis is therefore on the melancholy that the dying of the "Old Year" brings with it." [18]

The lyrical subject of the poem appears to be in a state of contemplation and self-reflection, showing his inner thoughts and feelings as he gazes at the sea.

The scene happens at night, which increases even more the nostagia and the feeling of something coming to the end, as if ushered in by the arrival of the night; something that brings with it a certainty in front of the day that ends, leading to a still unknown day. The scenary we find in the poem has clearly romantic hues: the lyrical subject appears in front of the sea, alone and at night. The Romanticism of the scene is expressed by the accordance between the individual and the scenery he is contemplating: the sea works as a mirror of the inner world of the lyrical subject; and this produces a personification of the sea (prosopopoeia) that sobs and sighs, as if mimicking the rhythm of the sobs and sigh of the speaker.

The sea is presented as a shelter and consolation for the lyrical subject, but it also intensifies even more his remembrances and his melancholic mood.

[18] De Keyser, Morgane, "An Intertextual Analysis of Vera Brittain's *Testament Of Youth".* Ghent University: MA Thesis in Arts and Philosophy, 2016, p.39. Hereafter cited in the text as Keyser.

We should emphasize the musicality as a constant presence all along the poem: the alliteration of the /s/ sound in the verse "There´s a sob on the sea" tries to simulate the sound of the sea and the sea- breeze. This way, the reader can "perceive" the sound of the sea when reading the poem.

There are also sound references in the words *sob, sighing* and even on the third line: "Borne on night wings to me", which evokes the echo of the sea-sound that reaches the subject through the wind and the current.

The feeling of anguish and of a foreboding of death, we have mentioned above, is intensified even more by the use of the present continuous "is dying". It makes death to appear inminent, pressing in such a way that the lyrical subject is unable to stop or to avoid it.

It is also important to take into account the fact that Leighton´s poem opened the December issue of *The School Magazine* in 1913, so there is no doubt that he intended to make a reference to the closing of the year and of that academic period.

Interestingly, we find a similar feeling of melancholy also related to the New Year´s Eve in a letter written by Roland to Vera on the 1st of January, 1915:

> When I left you I stood by the fountain in the middle of Piccadilly Circus to see the New Year in. It was a glorious night, with a full moon so brightly white as to seem blue slung like an arc-lamp directly overhead. I had the feeling of extreme loneliness one is so often conscious of in a large crowd (…) When 12 o´clock struck there was only a little shudder among the crowd and a distant muffled cheer, and then everyone seemed to melt away again leaving me standing there with tears in my eyes and feeling absolutely wretched. (*LG*, 43)

On the other hand, the loss of a past that can not come back bringing back to the mind all unfulfilled possibilities (dreams and desires) is condensed in the fith line of

"Triolet": "And for what could not be"; this line is dyed with sadness and regret. It seems as if the movement of the sea itself "shook" the subject of the poem, bringing back memories which are swept along and then again leave him back, alone.

The use of the present continuous to which we have previously referred to (*is dying, is sighing)* also provides a sense of the length of time: the moan of the sea seems to be carried by it, being suspended on it for a moment, although, this might appear contradictory within a poem that expresses the voracity of time. The truth is that it reflects the need on the part of the lyrical subject to seize time, aware of the ephemeral condition of human life.

Among the many poetic readings made by Leighton, modern French poetry seems to occupy a very special place. Leighton´s mother, the romantic novelist Marie Connor Leighton, was partly raised in France and was especially drawn to French poetry. She used to recite poems to Roland from a very young age. Roland was fluent in French, a subject he also studied at school and, as many of his letters reveal, he seemed to enjoy including French expressions and quoting French authors like Paul Verlaine. In a letter to his mother in December 1915, only a couple of weeks before he died, he quotes Verlaine´s poem "Le ciel est par-dessus le toit". [19]

While reading Roland´s "Triolet", we were able to find some echoes of Verlaine´s poems, such as Verlaine´s "Chanson d'automne (1866) or his later one: "Il pleure dans mon coeur" (1874).

These two poems share "Triolet"´s melancholic tone. The first one, "Chanson d´autumne" expresses nostalgia also through sound:

[19] See Leighton, Marie, *Boy of My Heart.* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916, p.16

Les sanglots longs

Des violons

De l'automne

Blessent mon coeur

D'une langueur

Monotone.[20]

The sorrowful sound of the violins, as it happened with the "sob" on the sea in "Triolet", leads to the lyrical subject´s sadness.

Besides, in both poems there is a similar reference to the deep effect of music on the human heart. While the pain expressed by Verlaine remains associated to the subject of the poem, ("blessent mon coeur"), in Leighton´s "Triolet" it will become universal pain: "the deep World-heart is sighing".

On the other hand, we find a number of references to the passing of time in Verlaine´s poem, and a deep longing for something that cannot come back:

Quand sonne l'heure

Je me souviens

Des jours anciens

Et je pleure

[20] Canedo Díez, Enrique. *La Poesía Francesa Moderna.* Gijón: Universos, 1994, p.141. Bilingual edition.

This is also present in “Triolet”, where the *tempus fugit* motif can be found in the reiteration of the verse “And the old year is dying” or in the fifth verse “And for what could not be”.

The movement of the sea in “Triolet” could also remind us of the wind that stirs the protagonist aimlessly in Verlaine´s poem:

Et je m’en vais
Au vent mauvais
Qui m’emporte
Deçà, delà,
Pareil à la
Feuille morte.

The other poem by Verlaine that was referred to above, “Il pleure dans mon coeur”, also shares some relevant features with “Triolet”: the human identification with an element of nature, the expressive use of sound, the presence of an interior cry (that of the subject´s heart) but also an external cry (the rain that falls over the city)…

Il pleure dans mon coeur
Comme il pleut sur la ville;
Quelle est cette langueur
Qui pénètre mon coeur?
Ô bruit doux de la pluie
Par terre et sur les toits!
Pour un coeur qui s'ennuie,

Ô le chant de la pluie! [21]

The Story of an African Farm, written by Olive Schreiner, was Leighton´s favourite novel. It was a book that was very much present throughout his life as will be shown throughout the analysis of his poetry. For that reason, it must be taken into account as a main source of inspiration and literary influence. On this respect, "Triolet" holds an outstanding similarity to the following passage of the novel:

> When I sat by it that night in the moonlight (…) Of all the things I have ever seen, only the sea is like a human being; the sky is not, nor the earth. But the sea is always moving, always something deep in itself is stirring it. It never rests. It is always wanting, wanting, wanting. It hurries on; and then it creeps back slowly without having reached, moaning. It is always asking a question, and it never gets the answer (…) the White foam breakers are saying that which I think. I walk alone with them when there is no one to see me, and I sing with them.[22]

2.1.3. "Clair de Lune"

Soft with the breath of flowers

And laughter of dead showers,

The passionate pale-lit hours

Encompass wood and lea;

And down the whispering river

The moon-bright dimples quiver

On waves that start and shiver

For fear to join the sea.

[21] Canedo Díez, Enrique. *La Poesía Francesa Moderna.* Gijón: Universos. 1994, p.147.

[22] Schreiner, Olive. *The Story of an African Farm*. Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.227. Hereafter cited in the text as *Schreiner*.

But when Night´s veil grows older,

Her subtle silence colder,

The poplar´s blackness bolder

Against the dawning sky.

New Day´s renascent embers

Make June´s dear dreams December´s;

And no one else remembers

Except the moon and I.

"Clair de Lune" stands out among the poems written by Leighton as it shows many music and sound effects but also because of a marked sense of rhythm and a very precise rhyme scheme.[23] It appeared in Uppingham´s *The School Magazine* July Issue of 1914, the same month that Roland finished his studies there. Its structure is composed of four quatrains. Each quatrain has heptasyllabic lines (the first three) and the last is a hexasyllabic line. The rhyme scheme across the four stanzas is the following: aaab cccb ddde fffe. The last line of each stanza rhymes with the last line of the subsequent stanza, as we can see above.

Apart from the rhyme scheme mentioned above, it is important to take into account the presence of the /r/ sound along the whole poem at the end of all the poem´s lines except for lines 4, 8, 12 and 16. This repetition of the /r/ sound at the end of the

[23] An example of Leighton´s poetic discipline as he studied prosody at school.

lines undoubtedly contributes to increase the rythm of the poem and strengthens its intensity, building up tension along the composition.

In Shelley´s sonnet "Adonais XXXII," we can see a very similar stress of the /r/ sound as well as some of the same elements that Roland uses in "Clair de Lune" (hour, shower, flower) but also some common images: the presence of waves, the lack of light and the crepuscular atmosphere:

> The weight of the superincumbent hour;
> It is a *dying* lamp, a *falling* shower,
> A breaking *billow*
> (…)
> On the withering flower
> The killing sun smiles *brightly*…[24]

Therefore, the weight of a romantic tradition seems to become clearly manifest in Roland´s poetry, and connected to this, the importance of musical sensations in "Clair de Lune". According to Claire Téchéné: "Musical sensations are part of the romantic vision of the world (nostalgia for a forsaken harmony, quest for a transparent meaning) and the music stands both as a paradigm and a counter-model for poetic expression."[25]

[24] Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Adonais.* Translated into Spanish by Vicente Gaos. Bilingual edition. Madrid: Colección Visor de Poesía, 2016, p.98.

[25] Téchéné, Claire. "Musical Descriptions and Sensations: the Presence of Music in English Romantic Poetry", in *Études anglaises*, Vol. 67, Université Lumière-Lyon II, 2014, p. 470.

We can now consider the presence of several types of rhyme in “Clair de Lune”. There is a complex web of sounds, both vocal and consonant, flowing through the whole poem as we will analyse below: consonants are to be found in flowers-showers-hours, river-quiver-shiver, older-colder-bolder and embers-December´s-remembers. But there are also many cases of assonance between words that are close to each other: /e/ (breath, dead) in lines 1 and 2, in line 10 (her, subtle, silence, colder) and line 13 (renascent, embers) , /a/- /e/ (flowers, laughter, showers), /i/- /e/ (whispering, river, dimples, quiver, shiver, fear), /ei/ (passionate, pale, waves, veil), /i/ (dear, dreams, december´s), /ou/ (grows, older), /iu/ (New, June) or further away like the /u:/ sound (wood, moon), /i:/ (lea, sea) and /ai/ (sky, I).

However, among all these literary devices the alliteration is, without any doubt, the one that stands out in the poem: almost in every single line of Leighton´s “Clair de Lune” we find an alliteration: /f/ in the first two lines (soft, of, flowers, laughter) and line 8 (for, fear); /z/ (with, breath) in line 1; /p/ (passionate, pale, encompass and within the single word poplar*)* in lines 3 and 4; /d/ in line 5 (and, down, the), line 12 (the, dawning) and line 14 (dear, dreams, December´s); /b/ in line 11 (blackness bolder); /s/ present along the four stanzas: soft, showers, passionate, encompass in the first stanza; whispering (an onnomatopoeic word), waves, start, shiver, sea in the second stanza; Night´s, grows, subtle, silence, poplar´s, blackness, against, sky in the third; Day´s renascent, embers, June´s dreams, December´s, else, remembers and except, in the last one.

On the other hand, we can find the literary device of anastrophe, frequent in romantic poetry, which appears in the very first stanza, opening the poem: “Soft with the breath of flowers/And laughter of dead showers / The passionate pale-lit hours/

Encompass wood and lea/." All these elements show that we are before a truly elaborate poem.

"Clair de Lune" shows a contemplative, melancholic tone and a nocturnal atmosphere similar to the one we have previously seen in "Triolet"; but, at the same time, it presents some of the most characteristic features of the romantic literary movement.

Nature and night appear as the main protagonists of the poem. The nocturnal landscape becomes overwhelming as it is described by the lyrical subject who contemplates the scene. The elements of nature and night are exalted, as it is through a connection with nature that the romantic lyrical subject experiences sublimity.

This protagonism of nature is reflected on how its elements are humanized; hence the figure of speech, prosopopoeia, that is used throughout the poem: "*breath* of flowers", "*laughter* of dead showers", "*whispering* river", "*passionate* pale-lit hours", "moon-bright dimples *quiver"*, "waves that *shiver* for *fear"*, "Night´s veil *grows older*…" The personification of the night (written in the poem with a capital N) is also well reflected in the use of the possesive *her* (line 10). Romantic poets treated nature as a living thing and they believed that there was a close connection between nature and man. In this sense, "Clair de lune" also offers us a pantheistic view of the world and therefore, it can be seen as an instance of the romantic sensitivity.

As readers, we can sense the solitude of the lyrical subject within the grandiose spectacle of nature. The lyrical subject is not revealed until the last verse of the poem:

"And no one else remembers/ Except the moon and I." There is a kind of complicity connecting the moon in the sky and the lyrical subject in the midst of the nocturnal scenario, as the only witnesses to the scene. The night atmosphere, the darkness and the silence help to stress the lyrical subject´s solitude.

On the other hand, the nocturnal landscape allows the world of emotions and subjectivity to gain importance. Romantic poetry was the poetry of feelings, emotions and the imagination as opposed to the objectivity of neoclassical poetry.

In "Clair de Lune", the sensorial elements are intensified as the night unfolds, as can be seen in the third stanza of the poem: "But when Night´s veil grows *older*/ Her subtle silence *colder*/ The poplar´s blackness *bolder*/ Against the dawning sky/", creating a scenario where both the beautiful and the mysterious are mingled.

Another important romantic feature that we can find in the poem is individualism. The romantic individual seeks refuge in nature and, at the same time, s/he isolates her/ himself from a society s/he does not identify with. "Clair de Lune" ´s last two lines perfectly reflect this individualism: "And *no one else* remembers/ *Except* the moon and *I".* The implicit reading of these lines would be that only the moon (and nature as a metonimic extension) is able to remember, to truly understand the individual. Therefore a complicity between the subject and nature takes place as it is nature which best mirrors the human passions.

Not only the musical aspect stands out in "Clair de Lune", there is also a clear sense of the pictorial through the whole composition. The description of this landscape

at night seems to become a painting to the reader. The first stanza of the poem introduces the general scenario: the night has fallen, a wood and a meadow appear in peace, surrounded by semidarkness. In the second stanza, the sight of the lyrical subject turns to the river and over the dark water the moon casts its brilliant light, providing the title for the poem. After the two first stanzas an interruption of the description takes place, a change that is introduced by the conjunction *but:* the night grows and everything is intensified; silence and cold also increase until the characteristic moment just before dawn, when the black of the trees gets darker against the sky of the breaking day. Within the last stanza, the climax of the poem takes place coinciding with the break of the day. Regarding the pictorial resources that we find in the composition, there are a series of references to color and light: *pale-lit, moon-bright, blackness, bolder* (colder shades, blacks and whites) in opposition to *dawning sky, embers* (associated to warm shades like reddish and orange).

It is important to notice the constant play of contrasts all along the poem, not just the *chiaroscuro*, that is present in the very title of the poem ("Clair de lune") or in the image "the poplar´s blackness bolder/ against the dawning sky", but also conceptual contrasts, the literary device of antithesis, as in the following contrasting elements: *laughter- dead, passionate- pale-lit, renascent- embers, June- December…*

As we have commented earlier, Verlaine seems to be a clear influence on Roland´s poetry. It is interesting to point out the words that Roland´s sister Clare writes in her novel *Tempestuous Petticoat*, recalling her own mother´s words, Marie Connor Leighton, praising her brother´s sensitivity:

> And I don´t forget how fortunate I am, for where, I ask, would you find anyone of Roland´s age spending all his spare time from his

> school work in setting Verlaine´s poems to music, or doing drawings of Spanish ladies with black mantillas and crimson carnations in their hair? Most young males think of nothing but cricket and football.[26]

It is very clear that Roland knew the well-known poem written by Verlaine "Clair de Lune" (1869), which later would inspire the third and most famous movement of Debussy's 1890 suite bergamasque of the same name:

> Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,
>
> Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres
>
> Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,
>
> Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.[27]

Even other Verlaine´s poem, "L´heure du berger", have images that we can find in Leighton´s poem:

> La prairie s'endort fumeuse
>
> Par les joncs verts où circule un frisson.
>
> (…)
>
> Des peupliers profilent aux lointains,
>
> Droits et serrés, leur spectres incertains…[28]

[26] Leighton, Clare. *Tempestuous Petticoat: The Story of an Invincible Edwardian.* London: Gollancz, 1947, p.183.

[27] Canedo Díez, Enrique. *La Poesía Francesa Moderna.* Gijón: Universos. 1994, p.143-144.

[28] Canedo Díez, Enrique. *La Poesía Francesa Moderna.* Gijón: Universos. 1994, p.142.

However, above all, the greatest similarity I could trace in Leighton´s "Clair de Lune" was found in a sonnet written by the English poet W.E.Henley, admired by Leighton.[29] Henley´s sonnet "XXII" (last stanza below) seems to be evidently echoed by Leighton in the end of "Clair de Lune":

> O star benignant and serene,
> I take the good to-morrow,
> That fills from verge to verge my dream,
> With all its joy and sorrow!
> The old, sweet spell is unforgot
> That turns to June December;
> And, tho´ the world remembered not,
> Love, we would remember.[30]

Finally, I would like to mention that Vera Brittain recalls in her well-known autobiographical novel *Testament of Youth* that years after Roland´s death, Victor Richardson, a common friend and Roland´s colleague at Uppingham, would tell her the following about the Speech Day of 1914:

> Do you remember the two Karg-Elert pieces that Sterndale Bennet played at the beginning of the service that afternoon? One of them, "Clair de Lune", seemed to move him deeply. He said it reminded him of you in its coldness and the sense of aloofness from the world…
>
> (*TY*, 72)

In fact, Roland himself wrote to Vera in June of 1915 a letter from Flanders, where he had been in the trenches for three months, in which he recalls that same song:

[29] References to W.E. Henley can be found in Leighton´s correspondence with Brittain.
[30] Henley, W.E. *Echoes of Life and Death*, Portland: B Mosher, 1908, p.26.

> Do you remember the Sunday that we walked up and down Fairfield Garden together and wouldn´t come in out of the rain? And I couldn´t keep the tears out of my eyes afterwards when Sterndale-Bennet played Karg Elert´s Clair de Lune in the chapel. You were sitting at the back near the door and I couldn´t see you without looking round, I remember. It all seems so very far away now. I sometimes think I must have exchanged my life for someone else´s… (*LG*, 117)

This could throw some light on Roland´s poem "Clair de Lune". The poem was published in Uppingham´s *The School Magazine* in July 1914 and the Speech Day took place on 11th July 1914 so it is very possible that Roland´s poem was inspired by the Karg- Elert organ piece of the same name.

2.1.4. "The Crescent and the Cross"

Sad with satiety the splendid day

In rose-flushed radiance on the darkening hills

Sank to its rest; and o´er the desert sand

The dark-blue Night crept on, and all the stars

Woke at her coming, and the scented breath

Of many breezes fanned the Tamarisks.

The soul-less wail of some snake-charmer´s pipe

Came from the Arab tents, and intertwined

The glowing passion of a youthful throat

Singing some love-song of the Bedawis.

Deep in the shadow knelt a shrouded form

With low-bent head, and pitying tear-bright eyes,

Gazing on one before her, who lay still-

So still, he seemed not moving, on the sand.

But his lips moved, and in his trembling hands

He clasped an ill-carved cross, and seemed to pray

Though no sound came to her who bent to hear,

Save the low murmur of her loved, who stood

Long-robed beside her, gaunt against the stars,

With hands uplifted towards the East, and called

On Him of Mecca that this stranger soul

Might come into great Allah´s Paradise

And stand unfearing at His judgement-seat.

Such was the traveller´s passing. And the cross

Slipped from his fingers. O´er the endless sand

The wailing of the piper died away:

And all was still…

According to Vera´s own transcription of the poem, "The Crescent and the Cross" is dated 1914. Besides, it seems that the only reference to the poem is made by Brittain in her diary on the 17th of July of 1914:

> This morning came a letter from Roland, enclosing what he calls the "deservedly prizeless Prize poem" about "The Crescent & the Cross". The poem has undoubted felicity of expression-it is a blank verse fragment- but as Uncle Will pointed out, in ideas it is derivative and the personal element is somewhat lacking. This of course he put down to the writer´s youth and inexperience; he is going through the imitative stage through which we all have to pass. I think the lack of personal expression is due to the strong element of reserve in his nature; he hides his deep feelings so well that certain of his friends scarcely believe he has any. In a letter I wrote him to-night I asked if he need extend that reticence to poetry.[31]

[31] Brittain, Vera. *Chronicle of Youth: War Diary 1913-1917*, ed Alan Bishop with Terry Smart. London: Gollancz, 1981, pp.81-82. Hereafter cited in the text as *CoY*.

Therefore, we decided to include it in the Juvenilia section, as it seemed to share some of the romantic features that are present in most of Roland´s poems of the first period. However, it is at the same time an original text, rather different from the rest of his poems, as we will show below.

All the lines, except for the last one, are decasyllables. On the other hand, the composition does not present a fixed rhyme scheme: we only find an assonant rhyme in lines 6 and 7 (pipe-intertwined), consonant rhyme in lines 13 and 14 (sand, hands) and a similar sound at the end of lines 19 and 20 (called, soul).

"The Crescent and the Cross" is both a narrative and a descriptive poem, whose length we consider to be relevant (27 lines) as all Leighton´s poems that have been preserved do not tend to be long.

On the other hand, it is interesting to point out the presence of various elements that will appear in other poems written by Leighton, such as *rose-flushed* (we find the variant *pink-flushed* in his love poem "In the Rose-Garden") or others like *rest*, *the dark-blue Night*, *scented*, all of them present in the last lines of his magnificent poem "Vale": "has flown to rest/ under the scented wings/ of the dark-blue Night."

The poem starts with an anastrophe, a figure of speech in which the normal word order is changed: "Sad with satiety the splendid day/ in rose-flushed radiance on the darkening hills/ sank to its rest". Therefore, the poem reproduces the same structure that opened "Clair de lune": "Soft with the breath of flowers/ and laughter of dead showers/ the passionate pale-lit hours/ encompass wood and lea."

There is also a certain parallelism within the lines of the poem: the repetition of the conjunction "and" (an anaphora) in lines 3, 4, 5 and in lines 15 and 16; the presence of a pause within the same line (lines 3, 4, 5, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24); or the recurrence of the structure the+ (adjective)+noun at the end of the first six lines of the poem (*the splendid day, the darkening hills, the desert sand, the stars, the scented breath, the tamarisks*…)

Although there is an absence of a marked, consonant rhyme in the poem, the presence of the alliteration (particularly of the /s/) stands out constantly along the whole composition. The title itself reproduces this sound: "The Cre*sc*ent and the Cro*ss*". Besides, in several occasions, the /s/ sound is repeated in one single line, as can be seen in line 1 (sad, *sa*tiety, *s*plendid), line 2 (ro*s*e-flu*sh*ed, radian*ce*, hill*s*), line 3 (sank, it*s*, re*s*t, desert, *s*and), line 7 (soul-le*ss*, *s*ome, *s*nake-charmer´*s*), line 10 (*s*inging, *s*ome, *s*ong), line 11 (*sh*adow, *sh*rouded), line 14 (*s*o, *s*till, *s*eemed, *s*and), line 21 (thi*s*, *s*tranger, *s*oul), line 24 (*s*uch, wa*s*, traveller´*s*, pa*ss*ing, cro*ss*), line 25 (*s*lipped, hi*s*, finger*s*, endle*ss*, *s*and)… The /r/ sound is also repeated in lines 2 and 3 (*r*ose, *r*adiance, *r*est).

"The Crescent and the Cross" shares another element with "Clair de Lune": the night plays a main role in the poem, not only the first letter of the word appears in capital, but there is also a reference to the night made by a possesive: "*her* coming" (line 5), just as we previously saw in "Clair de Lune" ("*her* subtle silence colder").

Therefore, there is a personification of the night, but also, of all the elements of nature that appear in the poem: "*sad* the splendid day", "the stars *woke*", "the scented *breath* of many breezes *fanned* the tamarisks"…

The first six lines of the poem describe the dusk, followed by the arrival of the night, the light of the day that fades away. Leighton´s poem makes the reader aware of a deep sense of the ephemeral, which will be very much present also in his poem "Vale", where the image of dusk bursts vividly as in a painting.

In "Clair de Lune" it was the other way around: the night crept in until the first daylight broke. However, both dusk and dawn in Leighton´s poems, represent the romantic and poetical moment *par excellence*, one of reflection, introspection and contemplation.

"The Crescent and the Cross" is a poem significantly charged with sensorial references: to smell ("s*cented* breath"), touch ("*fanned* the tamarisks"), sight (references to light and colour echoing the pictorial, especially in the first part of the poem: *rose-flushed, radiance, darkening, dark-blue, glowing, shadow, form, bright*).

However, the sense that stands out above all others is the sense of hearing. As we have mentioned earlier, Leighton not only uses the literary device of alliteration along the whole poem (i.e. the recurrence of the /s/) but he intends to create in the reader certain associations (the sound of the word *breezes* in line 6 simulates the sound of the wind; at the same time, the repetition of the /s/ evokes the sound of the wind instrument of the pipe). Music has a fundamental presence, especially from line 7 to 10, in which we find references to sound, to the act of singing and to the musical instrument: *wail, pipe, throat, singing, love-song, pray, sound, hear, low, murmur, wailing, piper, died away…*

On the other hand, it is also interesting to notice that the lyrical subject doesn´t appear (in the first person) in the poem, but acts like an observer, creating a certain distance. In this sense, "The Crescent and the Cross" along with "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz", differ from the rest of Leighton´s poetry, where it is frequent to find a lyrical voice in the first person. Besides, both of these poems share a Pre-Raphaelite feel. "The Crescent and the Cross" might also have been inspired by a painting.

From line 11 onwards the reader is introduced to the characters and to what is taking place in the scene: an Arabian woman, with tears in her eyes, kneels in front of an old dying traveller who is laying motionless on the sand, holding a cross between his hands and praying. Beside the woman, an Arabian man, dressed in a long tunic, rises his hands towards Mecca, begging Allah in a loud voice for the salvation of the Christian traveller´s soul. There is also an allusion to the figure of the snake-charmer in lines 7 and 26, whose presence in the poem is hinted at by the far away sound of a flute from the Arabian camp.

"The Crescent and the Cross"´s originality lies in its theme. The title of the poem makes a clear reference to two different worlds: the Eastern Moslem one, represented by the symbol of a crescent moon and the Western Christian, represented by the symbol of the cross. This attraction and fascination towards the East, towards exotic places and remote cultures was already present in Romanticism, as it offered a possibility of escape and great creative richness. Many European artists were enormously attracted to the Middle East, as the French painter Delacroix or the British pre-raphaelite painter William Holmant Hunt, who travelled to the East to study for his paintings. Hunt´s work reflects the exotic appeal of these lands and their people: "The Sphinx Gizeh looking

towards the Pyramids of Sakhara" (1854), "The Lantern Maker's Courtship" (1854), "The Afterglow in Egypt" (1861) or one of his finest works, "The Finding of the Savior in the Temple" (1854-1860).[32]

Professor Naji Oueijan points out the important presence of Orientalism in British Romanticism:

> Romantic Orientalism, became part of the larger movement of British Romanticism, which was further enthused by Napoleon´s invasion of Egypt (1798–1799) and Greece´s War of Independence (1821–1828). To Romantic travellers, scholars, artists and men of letters the Orient constituted a distant world which conveniently suited their search for the exotic and sublime experiences.[33]

This is the reason for which we find Orientalism in one of the most well-known British romantic poets: Lord Byron. Byron wrote four Turkish tales and a narrative poem "The Giaour" (first published in 1813) as a part of them. As for the title, the word "giaour" refers to a person who is not a believer in Islam. In Byron´s poem, the hero is a Christian, who is a foreigner in a Moslem world. In this way, the figure of the giaour, allows the reader to establish a contrast between these two religions, a contrast that Leighton also introduces when he names his poem "The Crescent and the Cross".

It is relevant to take into account the description of the Greek landscape at the beginning of Byron´s poem (lines 16-20) as there are some common elements with Leighton´s, such as the references to a soft breeze that sways the trees and brings a fragance:

[32] For more information on the Pre-Raphaelites and their connection to Orientalism see *The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East* by Leonora Sasso, Edinburgh University Press, 2018.

[33] Oueijan, Naji B. *Western Exoticism and Byron's Orientalism. Prism(s): Essays in Romanticism* (6), 1998, pp. 27-39.

And if at times a transient *breeze*

Break the blue crystal of the seas,

Or *sweep* one blossom from the *trees*,

How welcome is each *gentle air*

That *wakes* and *wafts* the *odours* there![34]

At the same time, the presence of music is also to be found in Byron´s poem "The Giaour" (lines 23-24): "The maid for whom his *melody,* / His thousand *songs* are heard on high…" And in some verses below (lines 40-41), we find a reference to a musical instrument and the night coming in: "Till the gay mariner´s *guitar/* Is heard, and seen the *evening star…"*

"The Crescent and the Cross" makes several references to the Arab world: *desert, endless sand, scented, tamarisks, snake-charmer, pipe, Arab tents, long-robed, East, Mecca, Allah, Bedawis…* The latter are a nomadic Arab community from the Arabian, Syrian and northern African deserts. The same community and atmosphere is present in several watercolours by the artist John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) who travelled to the Middle East and North Africa and whose work reflects very well this attraction to exotic peoples and Orientalism. Among these, painted between 1905-1906, we can find: "Bedouins", "Bedouin camp", "Arab gypsies in a tent", "Bedouin women"…

It is also important to mention here that Sargent, some years later, in 1918, travelled to the western front as an oficial war artist.

> Protected from the sun by a large white umbrella, Sargent worked in much the same manner as he did in the Alps or on the Canals of

[34] Byron, George Gordon, *The Giaour, a fragment of a Turkish tale*, London: Thomas Davison, 1814, p.2.

> Venice. He made watercolors and oil sketches of soldiers stealing fruit, soldiers in a hospital tent, soldiers being led to a dressing station after an attack of poison gas (…) He mentions several crowded frontline scenes, then comes back to "a harrowing sight, a field full of gassed and blindfolded men" (…) Sargent evokes the zone of trenches "the farther forward one goes", he had written, "the more scattered and meagre everything is." [35]

Interestingly, Roland already makes a reference to the Arab world in the article that he writes for Uppingham´s *The School Magazine*, "An old seaport town", published in June 1913, which was his first contribution to the school journal and where he skillfully describes the town of Ymuiden (Holland) and its people: "They wear wooden sabots, trousers of very distinctive and voluminous cut, usually of a nondescript dark brown colour, and round black velvet or fur caps *very like a Turkish fez in shape*."[36]

On the other hand, it is also worth mentioning that Roland´s father, Robert Leighton, who was a well-known author of adventure books, wrote a novel titled *In the Grip of the Algerine: A Historical Tale* in 1894, where the Arab atmosphere was also described, as can be seen in chapter XXI: "We were seated under the waving palm-trees eating our fruit, and I was stoutly refusing to return to Algiers. Now, amongst the dates and figs that we had carried as our provisions, there were some halfdozen ripe pomegranates…"[37]

In "The Crescent and the Cross", Leighton offers an ethimological interpretation of religion (from the Latin *religare:* to join), which is presented in the poem with a universal sense, like a unifying force more than a differentiating one. Both religions, the

[35] Fairbrother, Trevor. *John Singer Sargent: the Sensualist*. New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2001. pp.201-203.
[36] Leighton, Roland. "An Old Seaport Town" in *The Shool Magazine*, Uppingham: John Hawthorn, 1913 (June Issue), pp.137-140.
[37] Leighton, Robert. *In the grip of the Algerine: a historical tale of the Mediterranean,* London: Sunday School Union, 1894.

Muslim as well as the Christian, pursue the salvation of the human soul in the afterlife, both of them believe in the existence of a Paradise. Just like the Christians, Muslims also believe that, after death, they will be judged according to their deeds. It will be their good or bad actions which will take them to heaven or hell.

The poem clearly reflects Leighton´s interest and attraction towards the afterlife and the human soul, religion and spirituality in general. Regarding this, we should mention that Leighton was always attracted to Catholicism, despite the fact of his father being a unionist. Leighton would eventually convert to the catholic religion during the war, probably influenced by particular circumstances. His family and Vera, however, only found out about it after his death.

> Unknown to Vera or his family, he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church that summer (…) Of his recent conversion to Roman Catholicism Roland had said nothing. Yet his Company Commander testified to how religious, "almost devotional", he had become in the weeks before he died. Mrs Leighton was hurt and bewildered that her son should have excluded her from all knowledge of his new-found faith. But Vera accepted it with philosophical calm. She had certainly long been aware of his attraction to Catholicism, and was glad that he had died with the hope of a life hereafter.[38]

Vera also mentions Roland´s attraction to Catholicism and his later conversion to the Catholic church in *Testament of Youth:*

> Driven in upon myself, I sought such consolation as I could find in books and letters, and in Sunday morning visits to the Catholic church of St. James´s Spanish Place. Roland, his mother told me, had often gone to this church; long before the impulse had seized him to put "R.C." in the space for "Religion" in his Army papers, he had been attracted by the sybaritic mysticism of the Catholic faith.
>
> (*TY*, 247-248)

[38] Berry, Paul, and Mark Bostridge. *Vera Brittain: A Life*. London: Virago Press, 2001, pp.93-94. Hereafter cited in the text as *VB*.

Finally, to conclude the present analysis, it should be mentioned that an important source of inspiration for Roland to write this poem might have been *The Garden of Kama and Other Love Lyrics from India*, written by Adela Florence Nicolson, under the pseudonym of Laurence Hope: "I made a small shrine for a few of the books that Roland and I had admired and read together. *The Story of an African Farm* was there and *The Poems of Paul Verlaine*, as well as *The Garden of Kama* and *Pêcheur d´Islande*…" (*TY*, 248)

Although the book was published in 1901, more illustrated editions appeared in 1909 and 1914. The poems included in *The Garden of Kama* were passed off as translations of Indian poets but all of them were original works, none was actually a translation. In the book, Nicolson makes liberal use of the imagery and symbols from the poets of the North-West Frontier of India and the Sufi poets of Persia. Many of the poems that appear in the book are set in North Africa and the Far East, and show both a decadent style and a confessional tone.

Among all these poems, there is one that strinkingly seems to resonate in Leighton´s "The Crescent & the Cross", titled "Reverie of Mahomed Akram at the Tamarind Tank":

Daylight dies,

The Camp fires redden like angry eyes,

The Tents show white,

In the glimmering light,

Spirals of tremulous smoke arise, to the purple skies,

And the hum of the Camp sounds like the sea,

Drifting over the sand to me.

Afar, in the Desert some wild voice sings

To a jangling zither with minor strings,

And, under the stars growing keen above (…)

Beyond our tents the sands stretch level and far,

Around this Little oasis of Tamarind trees.

A curious, Eastern fragance fills the breeze…[39]

2.1.5. "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz"

A face emmarbled, passionless, as one
Some Gorgon Fear has looked on, but her eyes,
Soft, limpid eyes with amethyst aglow
Like pools at sunrise, eyes beneath whose gaze
One fears to speak lest all their tenderness
Should melt into one iridescent tear…

Although not published in Uppingham´s *The School Magazine,* "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz" was written by Roland while he was still at school[40], for Vera mentions the poem in *Testament of Youth*, when recalling a letter sent by Roland to her during the spring of 1914: "A few days later, at any rate, another letter came; its purport

[39] Hope, Laurence. *The Garden of Kama and Other Love Lyrics from India,* London: William Heinemann, 1914, pp.6-7.

[40] According to Vera´s own transcription of Leighton´s poem kept at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz" was dated 1913, which makes this poem one of the first ones written by Leighton that have been preserved.

was to persuade me to go to Uppingham Speech Day in the summer, and to enclose two more of his poems for which I had asked, `Triolet´ and `Lines on a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz´." (*TY*, 66)

As the title shows, it is a brief outline or reflection that a work of art (in this case a painting) aroused in the poet. Therefore, we are in front of an *ekphrasis*, an educational practice that was originally performed by the rhetoric schools of Ancient Greece, which consisted in giving expression to and describing a work of art by means of words, loading these with the sensorial elements of the work of art, thus providing words with iconic and plastic properties. As González de Ávila points out:

> La *ekphrasis* se basaba en la teoría de Horatio "Ut pictura poiesis", que consideraba el poema como una pintura que habla y la pintura como poesía muda. El principio de Horacio se había basado a su vez en la teoría de Simónides sobre la primacía epistemológica de la vista (S.VI a.C). El tópico "Ut pictura poiesis" sería asimilado más tarde por el humanismo renacentista.[41]

Although the title of the poem doesn´t reveal the name of the painting, it does refer to its author: the English painter of German descent Herbert Gustave Schmaltz (1856-1935), who would change his name after the German defeat of the Great War in 1918 to John Wilson Carmichael. His work was related to the Pre-Raphaelite movement and he had a close friendship with the well-known Pre-Raphaelite artists William Holmant Hunt and Frederic Leighton. Schmaltz´s work was significantly influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite school, as well as by Orientalism, in which he became highly interested after his trip to Jerusalem in 1890.

[41] González de Ávila, Manuel. "Las relaciones entre la pintura y la escritura en el mundo grecorromano", Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2017.

The poem describes a female portrait that presents very similar features to those of a statue: "A face emmarbled, passionless, as one/ some Gorgon Fear has looked on…" The face of this woman is described as cold, inexpressive, as if it was made of stone. We can find, on the other hand, a reference to the mithological figure of the Gorgon. Erika Bornay further explores the concept of the Gorgon in her essay *Las hijas de Lilith*, where she defines it as "un monstruo alado de garras afiladas, cuya cabeza tenía serpientes en lugar de cabellos, si bien lo que la hacía más temible era su mirada penetrante que convertía a los hombres en piedra"[42]

This female monster has its origins in the Classical Greek mithology. The Gorgon is already to be found in Homero´s great novels *Illiad* and *Odyssey*. The image of the Gorgon has frequently appeared in art and therefore it belongs to a long literary, pictorial tradition. Among the most well-known pictorial representations we find Caravaggio´s and Ruben´s Medusas. Later on, during the 19th century, the Gorgon will also be the main character in paintings by E. Burne Jones or F. Khnopff.[43]

"On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz" is close both because of its aesthetics and of its content, to the literary movement of Decadence and Aestheticism. We find features like the cult of beauty, the importance of the sensorial, the amalgam of feelings and colours, the abundance of adjectives, the use of a rich and sonorous vocabulary in order to foster the musical and sensorial qualities of the verses: *emmarbled*, *amethyst*, *iridescent…* (words which also own qualities of light, texture and colour), the literary

[42] Bornay, Erika. *Las hijas de Lilith*, Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2014, p. 269-275. Hereafter cited in the text as *Bor*.

[43] See Marsh, Jan. Pre- Raphaelite Women (1987), Great Brittain: Weidenfeld& Nicolson, pp. 109-120.

device of alliteration, as can be seen in lines 4 (beneath whose gaze) or 6 (iridescent tear).

Another common feature that the poem shares with the decadent movement is the way in which the female figure is depicted: echoing a Pre-Raphaelite beauty, mystic, evil and sentimental. The woman combined at the same time power and innocence, it was plural and contradictory. In his book *History of Beauty*, Umberto Eco describes this female depiction, frequently found in decadent aesthetics of the XIX century:

> The great themes of Decadent sensibility all revolve around the idea of a Beauty that springs from the alteration of natural powers.The English aesthetes, from Swinburne to Pater, and their French epigones, began a rediscovery of the Renaissance seen as an unexhausted reserve of cruel and sweetly diseased dreams: in the faces painted by Botticelli and Leonardo they sought for the vague physiognomy of the androgyne, of the manwoman of unnatural and indefinable Beauty. And when they fantasise about woman (when she is not seen as Evil triumphant, the incarnation of Satan, elusive because incapable of love and normality, desirable because she is a sinner, beautified by the traces of corruption), what they love is the altered nature of her femininity: she is the bejewelled woman of Baudelaire's dreams, she is the flower-woman or the jewel-woman, she is D'Annunzio's woman, who can be seen in all her charm only if compared to an artificial model, to her ideal progenitrix in a painting, a book, or a legend.[44]

According to Bornay, the definition of *femme fatale* as a concept, appears for the first time at the turn of the century, some time after the image had been created, first in literature and then, in the visual arts. Following Bornay´s description of the *femme fatale*:

> Hay, en general, una coincidencia en describirla como una belleza turbia, contaminada, perversa. Incuestionablemente, su cabellera es larga y abundante, y, en muchas ocasiones, rojiza. Su color de piel pone acento en la blancura, y no es nada infrecuente que sus ojos sean descritos como de color verde (...) Destacará por su capacidad de dominio, y su frialdad… (*Bor*, 114)

[44] Eco, Umberto. *On Beauty: A History of a Western Idea.* Translated from the Italian by Alastair McEwen. London: Seeker& Warburg, 2004, p. 342. Hereafter cited in the text as *Eco.*

Some of these physical and psychological features are also attributed to the female figure in Leighton´s poem: pale skin, light coloured eyes, powerful, cold…

Besides, Bornay mentions, among others, the English poet Swinburne, in whose work the presence of this kind of women is essential: "[que] curiosamente, también poseen más de ídolo que de ser humano real" (Bor, 116). And, again, according to Bornay, "en Inglaterra será A. Ch. Swinburne quien fije en los años 1860 el tipo de mujer fatal, en la literatura y poesía de aquel país". (Bor, 120). This is very remarkable, as for Leighton Swinburne was one of his most beloved poets. In fact, he considered the idea of giving Vera a volume of Swinburne on her birthday[45].

The figure of the Gorgon was already present in the great British romantic poet Shelley, who was "a deliberate purveyor of themes related to Satanism and vampirism, bewitched by the image of the Gorgon (…) in which horror and Beauty are all one" (*Eco,* 323). This can be seen in his poem "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, in the Florentine Gallery", written in 1819:

Tis the tempestuous loveliness of terror;
For from the serpents gleams a brazen glare

(…)

Of all the beauty and the terror there-
A woman's countenance, with serpent locks,

[45] See Roland´s letter to Vera of 14th December 1914. Bishop, Alan, and Mark Bostridge. *Letters from a Lost Generation.* London: Virago Press, 2008, p.40.

Gazing in death on heaven from those wet rocks.[46]

In Leighton´s poem the contradictory nature of the woman is represented by the contrast between her stiff, enigmatic face and her eyes, full of tenderness and purity. On the other hand, another important element within the decadent movement is jewellery, also related to the decadent concept of womanhood. The elements of precious stones are also found in "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz": *amethyst* aglow, *iridiscent, emmarbled*…

The beauty of Leighton´s poem lies in his attempt to capture the deep contrast that exists between the face and the eyes of the woman in the painting. Her clear, pure gaze is able to move both the lyrical subject and every single viewer. Both the intensity and gentleness of the gaze are condensed in the powerful image and methapor "like pools at sunrise", of an impressionist quality.

Some clear resonances to the appearance of the woman depicted by Leighton are to be found in D´Annunzio´s poem "Gorgon" of 1885:
"Ella avea diffuso in volto/quel pallor cupo che adoro/le splendea l´alma ne li occhi/ quale in chiare acque un tesoro/ Quel sorriso tristamente/ combattea con la dolcezza/ de´lunghi occhi e dava un fascino/ sovrumano a la belleza…" [47]

It is also interesting to take into account the poem titled "La Beauté", written by the French symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire in 1857, which shows many common features with Leighton´s own poem. We have already considered Leighton´s early

[46] Bysshe Shelley, Percy. *Posthumous poems 1824. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834,* New York: University of Michigan, 1991, p. 139.
[47] D´Annunzio, Grabriele. *L'isottèo: La chimera (1885-1888).* Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1890, pp.129-136.

closeness and admiration towards French poetry, inculcated by his mother, who had been partly educated in France.

In Baudelaire´s poem the female beauty is also represented as a piece of art (there is a clear reference to statues: *un rêve de Pierre*, *sphinx, blancheur des cygnes*, *fiers monuments*) and the lyrical subject´s contemplation of the painting arouses terror as much as fascination. Besides, the features of the *passionless, emmarbled* figure in Schmaltz´s painting strikingly coincide with those described by the lyrical subject in Baudelaire´s poem:

> J'unis un coeur de neige à la blancheur des cygnes;
> Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes,
> Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris.[48]

Even those "Soft, limpid eyes with amethyst aglow like pools at sunrise" of Leighton´s poem seem to echo the ones in Baudelaire´s "La Beauté":

> De purs miroirs qui font toutes choses plus belles:
> Mes yeux, mes larges yeux aux clartés éternelles!

It is also interesting to find a quote from Oscar Wilde´s poem "Roses and Rue" (1884) in a letter Roland sent to Vera from the front. With those lines he tries to express his love for Vera as well as to recall her deep amethyst eyes [49]:

[48] Gullón, Ricardo. *El simbolismo. Soñadores y Visionarios*. Colleción Oval nº 1. Madrid: J. Tablate Miquis Ediciones, 1984, p. 56.
[49] See Leighton´s letter to Vera quoted in Brittain´s diary entrance on the 6th September 1915 (*CoY*, 268).

And your eyes, they were green and grey

Like an April day,

But lit into amethyst

When I stooped and kissed

After having carried out the analysis of Leighton´s early poems in the section above, we can conclude that the main characteristics of his early poetry are the presence of Romanticism (his depiction of nature as a grand force in his poems "Clair de Lune" and "Triolet") as well as a decadent aesthetic found in the Pre-raphaelite hues of his poem "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz" and in the attraction to the East in "The Crescent and the Cross".

Despite being an early stage in the poet´s career, we can already trace a clear sense of rythm, musicality and use of sounds (he studied Latin and Greek prosody at school) together with a significant knowledge of the French symbolist poetry and an acute sense of the pictorial, which will be present in all his works. On the other hand, the questions of spirituality and religion that appear in "The Crescent and the Cross" will grow in importance in some of Leighton´s later poems and fragments, especially after the outbreak of the Great War and the poet's first-hand experience at the front.

3. Love & War Poems

In this section, we have included the love poems that Leighton wrote to Vera as well as those written by the young poet from the French front, which we have chosen to name war poems. The reason to include both love and war poems in the same section is justified by the fact that the love theme is present in the poems written by Leighton during his short stay in the front (April-December 1915) side by side with the horror of war. Thus, we present an estimated chronological sequence of the poems, with the purpose of letting the reader accompany the author´s poetic evolution and lived experience, which will begin with the discovery of love and will finish with a pessimistic, disillusioned vision due to the harsh reality of the Great War.

3.1. "In the Rose- Garden"

Dew on the pink-flushed petals;
Roseate wings unfurled;
"What can, I thought, be fairer
In all the world?"

Steps that were fain but faltered
(What could she else have done?)
Passed from the arbour´s shadow
Into the sun.

Noon and a scented glory,
Golden and pink and red;
"What after all are roses

To me?" I said.

In this poem, written before the outbreak of the war[50], Leighton describes his encounter with Vera Brittain on the Uppingham Speech Day, the day Roland graduated, which took place on Saturday, the 11th of July of 1914. Vera talks about this meeting and the summer idyllic atmosphere that seemed to surround Roland and her that day, in *Testament of Youth:*

> The afternoon was so hot, and our desire for conversation so great, that Roland and I were relieved when the concert ended, and we could lose ourselves in the crowd at the Headmaster´s garden party. I remember today how perfectly my dress- a frilled pink ninon with a tiny pattern, worn beneath a rose-trimmed lace hat- seemed to have been made for our chosen corner of the garden, where roses with velvet petals softly shading from orange through pink to crimson foamed exuberantly over the lattice-work of an old wooden trellis. But even if I had forgotten, I should still have Roland´s verses, "In the Rose- Garden", to renew the fading colours of a far away dream.
>
> (*TY*, 71)

Formally the poem consists of twelve lines and can be divided into three four-line stanzas. Within each quatrain the meter varies as Leighton combines two rising (iambs) and one falling feet (dactyls, trochees). As Morgane De Keyser points out: "Here, falling can be interpreted as falling in love, which is then rendered positive by the rising feet, that conclude each stanza. The poem thus ends on a positive note both formally and thematically."[51]

[50] The poem was dated 11th July 1914 (Uppingham Speech Day) according to Vera´s own transcription of Leighton´s poem kept at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

[51] De Keyser, Florine Morgane. "´There Was Only One Course left to Tell my own Fairly Typical Story as Truthfully as I Could against the Larger Background´. An Intertextual Analysis of Vera Brittain´s *Testament of Youth*". Ghent University: Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, 2016, p. 23. Hereafter cited in the text as *Keyser.*

The first stanza describes the delicate beauty of the roses (evoking sensorial details of colour and touch, in reference to the dew drops…) The lyrical subject is first introduced by an "I" in line 3, who wonders flabbergasted about so much beauty: "What can be fairer?". There´s an important sense of intimacy along the poem, as we discover the scene through the eyes of the lyrical subject, his thoughts and feelings expressed in the questions of each quatrain.

In the second stanza, a female figure appears in the garden scenario, whose walk first seems to be willing but momentarily hesitant: "Steps that were fain but faltered". Formally, there is also an interruption in the text, introduced by a hyperbathon: "(What could she else have done?)". This could be both interpreted as an observation made by the lyrical subject or as a transcription of the female´s own thoughts.

The third stanza somehow reinstates the sensorial atmosphere of the first stanza. Colours, scents and light melt together to recreate the harmonious beauty of the scene: "Noon and a scented glory/ golden and pink and red".

The poem´s ending is highly personal as we find a first person pronoun referring to the lyrical "I" twice within one very short line: "to *me* ?´ *I* said". There could be a possible implied meaning in this rethorical question: "What after all are roses to me" (when I love another kind of "rose", i.e. a beautiful woman…)

It is also important to consider the alliteration of the /s/ sound along the poem, as it contributes to create a soft flow that hightens the harmony of the scene: *flushed, roseate, she, else, passed, shadow, sun, scented, roses, said…*

De Keyser explores in her essay the intertextual interaction between Roland´s poem "In the Rose- Garden" and Vera´s second chapter in *Testament of Youth* titled "Provincial Young-Ladyhood", in which Brittain criticized the ideal of the Victorian

woman, subordinate and passive: “This critique is also echoed by the poem of the self-proclaimed feminist Roland Leighton[52], who questions what else she could have done in parentheses.” (*Keyser*, 24)

Besides, De Keyser points out some striking similarities that both (Roland´s poem and Vera´s chapter) show to a poem by the Victorian poet Augusta Webster “The Happiest Girl in the World” (1870), which has a passage that is strikingly similar to Brittain´s depiction in *Testament of Youth* of her encounter with Leighton on the Uppingham Speech Day previously quoted above:

> And he saw me come along the coppice walk
>
> beneath the green and sparkling arch of boughs,
>
> and, while he watched the yellow lights that played
>
> with the dim flickering shadows of the leaves
>
> over my yellow hair and soft pale dress,
>
> flitting across me as I flitted through,
>
> he whispered inly, in so many words,
>
> "I see my wife; this is my wife who comes,
>
> and seems to bear the sunlight on with her:"
>
> (…)

[52] Roland claimed that the fact that his mother´s writing largely supported the household made him a feminist. He also discussed his feminist views with Vera during their long walks and correspondence. In fact, he was the one to introduce her his favourite novel, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) by Olive Schreiner, a novel that addresses women´s social and political independence.

as I advanced demurely, it was well

I had on the pale dress with sweeping folds

which took the light and shadow tenderly,

and that the sunlights touched my hair and cheek…[53]

As De Keyser observes, Webster´s poem not only echoes Brittain´s description of the scene in *Testament of Youth* but also Leighton´s poem "In the Rose- Garden": "Similarly Leighton in his second stanza describes how a girl steps from shadows into the sun in an almost idyllic scene. Both the description of the dress and the male gaze tell us about the social structures of the pre-war era…" (*Keyser*, 27)

On the other hand, Sarah Montin has referred to Leighton´s poem "In the Rose-Garden" in her essay "Not Flowers for Poet´s tearful foolings", where she examines First World War poetry, flowers and the pastoral failure. According to Montin, flowers seem to lose their pastoral meaning in Leighton´s poem: "The language of flowers loses its relevance even to the most sentimental of young poets: `What after all are roses to me?´ asks Roland Leighton in `The Rose Garden´." [54]

However, I don´t completely agree with Montin, as I believe roses in this particular Leighton´s poem still have a traditional meaning of love, passion and beauty. It is a sentimental poem, written by a young man before the outbreak of the war and it

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[53] Webster, Augusta, *Portraits*, London: Macmillan and Co, 1870, pp. 23-34.

[54] Montin, Sarah. "Not Flowers for Poets´tearful foolings. First World War Poetry, flowers and the Pastoral Failure", published in *An International Journal of the Humanities*: *War, Literature & the Arts*, after the International Conference "Flores, Flowers, Fleurs", New University of Lisbon, 2011, p.8. Hereafter cited in the text as *Montin.*

was inspired by his encounter with Vera on the Uppingham Speech Day, a time when they were starting to be interested in one another. Besides, Marie Connor Leighton uses the poem in her novel *Boy of My Heart* to introduce the start of her son and Vera´s love relationship.[55] Roses in this poem are, therefore, associated with beauty, love, purity, youth, harmony, etc.

In other poems written by Leighton later on, however, the symbolic use of the pastoral flowers in order to escape from the horrid scenario of the Great War will fail in the end, as will be explored further on in relation to Leighton´s poem "Violets".

3.2. "Nachklang"

Down the long white road we walked together
Down between the grey hills and the heather,
Where the tawny-crested
Plover cries.

You seemed all brown and soft, just like a linnet,
Your errant hair had shadowed sunbeams in it,
And there shone all April
in your eyes.

With your golden voice of tears and laughter

[55] See chapter XII of Leighton, Marie Connor, *Boy of My Heart*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916, p. 157.

Softened into song 'Does aught come after

Life,' you asked 'When life is

laboured through?

What is God and all for which we're striving?'

'Sweetest sceptic, we were born for living;

Life is Love, and Love is-

You, dear, you.'

This poem was written by Leighton in April of 1914, as recorded by Vera in *Testament of Youth*: "I discovered long afterwards from a poem- one of the very few that he did not consign to the waste-paper basket- which he had called `Nachklang´, and dated April 19th, 1914" (*TY*, 65). "Nachklang" was, therefore, written after his stay at the Brittain´s family house in Buxton during the Easter of that same year. As has already been mentioned in this essay, Edward Brittain, Vera´s brother, was one of Roland´s closest friends and he invited Leighton to spend part of the holidays with them. It was during those days that Roland and Vera had their first close encounter [56] and got better acquainted with each other. They spent considerable time walking and discussing different issues, as is recorded by Brittain:

> My diary reminds me that, for the rest of the day, 'Roland and I discussed various matters such as literature and religion´; that I washed my hair that evening and carried on our conversation in the process of drying it, and that the next morning, on a long walk to a

[56] Vera had met Roland the previous summer, in June 1913, when she attended Uppingham ´Old Boys´ week with her mother. On the 29th of June 1913, Vera´s brother Edward brought Roland into dinner with them. That night Vera wrote in her diary: "I like him inmensely, he seems so clever & amusing & hardly shy at all". See Vera Brittain´s *Chronicle of Youth*, (1981). London: Book Club Associates, p.38.

> neighbouring village we `had a most interesting conversation, a good deal of which was about our ideas of inmortality´. (*TY*, 64)

It was during this "course of a ten-mile Sunday walk between hills and moors through the famous Goyt Valley and back to Buxton down the steep Manchester Road…" (*TY*, 64) that they talked about the afterlife for the first time. Inmortality would become a recurrent topic in their future conversations as well as in their correspondence, especially after the Great War broke out. [57]

According to Berry and Bostridge, this topic would be brought again to the young couple´s conversation only a few days before Roland left to the front in France. He had been invited to spend the night at Melrose by Vera´s parents in order to say goodbye before leaving: "After dinner as they sat before the fire in the drawing-room, their renewed discussions about the possibility of a Hereafter seemed to take on a terrible urgency." (*VB*, 74)

Recalling their first profound talk in Buxton during the Easter holidays of 1914, and evoking Roland´s poem "Nachklang", Vera writes: "Only a fragment of our conversation drifts back to me through the medium of a letter written to Edward during the War: `But what is God, then?´ `Well, of course, if we´re going to discuss the nature of the Deity…" (*TY*, 65)

The title of the poem, from the German "nach" (after) and "klang" (sound) means echo or reverberation, the reminiscence of a sound. Therefore, the title itself plays not only with the idea of music but with the act of evoking and bringing back the past as well. According to Leighton´s nephew, David Leighton, Roland may have been

[57] Brittain´s diary entrance of the 22nd of August 1915 (*CoY*, 252-254) describes extensively the long conversation they had on this subject during Leighton´s leave at Lowestoft, where she stayed at the Leighton´s family house *Heather Cliff*.

thinking of Shelley´s lines "Music, when soft voices die, / Vibrates in the memory" while writing the poem.[58]

"Nachklang" is a love poem, in which Leighton echoes the beauty and intensity of their long walk on that spring morning. The poem has two clearly different parts, as confirmed by the rhyming scheme: aab**c** dde**c** ff**gh** ii**gh**. The first one, predominantly descriptive, is composed of the first and second stanzas (linked together by the last word of each stanza, that share the same rhyme /ai/: *cries, eyes*). This first part of the poem helps the reader recreate the natural scenario of Buxton´s surroundings through certain elements of nature: hills, heather, plover… The colour details are also essential to compose the scene: *white* road, *grey* hills, *tawny* plover… From the beginning of the poem, we can already find the element of sound, introduced by the bird and its song: "where the tawny-crested/ Plover cries". It is also important to notice that the first letter of the bird´s name appears in capital, stressing its importance in the poem.

In the second stanza, the female figure is described as the sunlight falls on her skin, hair and eyes, making her glow. The colours that stand out through the poem have the same warm hues: *tawny, brown, sunbeams, golden*… On the other hand, the female figure is compared to a bird in the first line of the second stanza: "You seemed all brown and soft, just like a linnet". Again, we find the presence of the bird, an implicit reference to music. The musical sound will appear again in the third stanza of the poem, when the voice of the female figure is seen as a song: "With your golden voice of tears and laughter/ Softened into song…"

[58] From a live, private interview recorded in London 23rd of March, 2017 and further written correspondence.

At this point, we should stress how Leighton´s poem echoes Oscar Wilde´s "Roses and Rue" (1884), where the female figure is also compared to a bird and whose voice is also given a clear musical quality:

And your voice had a quaver in it,

Just like a linnet,

And shook, as the blackbird's throat

With its last big note

Not only both poems share the identical line "Just like a linnet", but, moreover, the image used by the lyrical subject to describe the woman´s hair in Leighton´s poem is very similar to that used by Wilde in his poem:

I remember your hair- did I tie it?

For it always ran riot-

Like a tangled sunbeam of gold [59]

The second part of Leighton's poem is composed of the third and forth stanzas, which share the same rhyme in their last two lines: *is, through*/ *is, you*, respectively. While the first part of the poem was predominantly descriptive, the second is dialogical, as Leighton introduces a dialogical movement, a structure that allows him to reproduce more vividly the conversation he and Vera carried out. Using inverted comas, he incorporates in the poem questions on the possibility of an afterlife or the concept of a deity: "`Does aught come after/ Life, ´you asked `When life is/ Laboured through?/ What is God, and all for which we´re striving?´".

[59] Wilde, Oscar. *Selected Poems of Oscar Wilde* (1911). London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, pp.122-27.

The dialogic device is a characteristic feature in Leighton´s poetry, present not only in "Nachklang" but in other poems such as "In the Rose-Garden", "Roundel" or "Violets".

The male response to the beloved one at the end of the poem "`Life is Love, and Love is/ You, dear, you´" surprisingly resembles the famous rhyme XXI of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, the Spanish romantic poet:

> ¿Qué es poesía?, dices mientras clavas
> en mi pupila tu pupila azul;
> ¡Qué es poesía! ¿Y tú me lo preguntas?
> Poesía… eres tú.[60]

Both poems share the structure of a dialogue and the change in tone through the poem (interrogative and exclamative in Bécquer´s poem, descriptive/narrative and interrogative in Leighton´s). Despite the fact that both poems have the appearance of a conversation, the presence of the rhythm and rhyme is essential: assonant in Bécquer´s case and consonant in Leighton´s.

Bécquer intended to reach the ethereal language of music in his poems, an ideal which poetry ought to pursue. In Bécquer´s rhyme, poetry and by extension, music, is identified with the woman, the same that happens in Leighton´s poem, where the woman and the song are one (as we have previously shown, she is not only compared to the bird but her voice is also given a musical quality). Life, love, song and poetry are, therefore, the one and same thing for both poets.

[60] Bécquer, Gustavo Adolfo. *Rimas y leyendas*. Edición de Tomás Sánchez Santiago. España: Biblioteca Hermes-Clásicos Castellanos. 1997, p.112.

Bécquer´s poetic work would be published posthumously in Spain in 1871, a year after his death. Despite his work being hardly acknowledged during his lifetime except for a close circle of friends, the recognition of his figure and work (poetic and narrative) would be forged and spread around Europe in the years after his death. Rica Brown lists in her essay "La fama póstuma de Bécquer" the references about the romantic poet that can be found in European literature of the 19th century. Among the most outstanding references, we can mention those of the English novelist Augustus J. Hare in his book *Wanderings in Spain* of 1873, that, as Brown states "es prueba de que ya la fama de Bécquer ha cruzado los Pirineos y el Canal de la Mancha." [61]

In 1874, some of his poems were translated into French and published in *La Gironde*, in Bordeaux. In 1877, the second edition of Bécquer´s *Obras* was published in Spain, and in its introduction Ramón Rodríguez Correa states the following: "apenas hay lengua culta donde no se hayan traducido sus poesías o su prosa". (Cited in *Brown*, 529)

However, in 1883, an important event will take place for the recognition of Bécquer in England. *Macmillan´s Magazine* will publish an article on the life and work of the author written by the writer Mrs. Humphry Ward, who was part of Oxford´s intellectual society. On her article titled "A Spanish Romanticist: Gustavo Bécquer", she declares: "He only, it seems to me, among the crowd of modern Spanish versifiers, has any claim to a European audience or any chance of living to posterity"[62]. Later on she will add: "instead of retreating from notice, he and his poems, few and scanty as they are, will win year by year a more general recognition". Besides, she not only makes

[61] Brown, Rica. "La fama póstuma de Bécquer: nuevos datos" in *Estudios sobre Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer*, Madrid, C.S.I.C., 1972, p.528. Hereafter cited in the text as *Brown.*

[62] Humphrey Ward, Mary A. "A Spanish Romanticist: Gustavo Bécquer." in *Macmillan's Magazine*, No. 280, February, 1883, pp. 305-320. Hereafter cited in the text as *Ward.*

a detailed analysis of Bécquer´s poems in this article, but she includes several of her own translations of his poems into English.

In the first decades of the 20th century, Bécquer is mentioned in an article of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1910-1911. And only a few years after that, in 1913, part of his poetry would be compiled by the Scottish hispanist Fitzmaurice Kelly in the anthology *The Oxford Book of Spanish Verse: XIII Century-XX Century:* "Pensada para estudiantes universitarios de español y público en general, fue muy difundida en el mercado en lengua inglesa (…) En el volumen se certifica la amplia distribución de la editorial, con oficinas en Londres, Edimburgo, Glasgow…" [63]

Bearing in mind all the facts we have presented here, it seems probable that Leighton had known Bécquer´s work and had had access to it. However, it will be the last poem Leighton wrote in the front, "Hédauville", the one that seems to keep stunning resonances of the Spanish romantic poet´s most well known rhyme LIII, "Volverán las oscuras golondrinas", as will be examined further on.

To conclude the analysis of "Nachklang", I would like to mention how Vera Brittain makes a reference to Leighton´s poem in one of her own, titled "After three years", that she dedicates to Roland: "What though no spring shall ever now renew/ The April in my eyes, the wayward will…"[64] It is rather significant how several of Brittain´s poems respond to Leighton´s: "After three years", "Roundel", "Perhaps"… all of them somehow show Vera´s need to keep on their dialogue, even after Leighton´s death.

[63] Freire López, Ana María, Ballesteros Dorado, Ana Isabel. *La Literatura Española en Europa (1850-1914)*. Madrid: UNED, 2017.

[64] Brittain, Vera. *Verses of a VAD with Poems of the War and After*. London: IWM Reprint, 1995, p.58.

3.3. "Roundel (Vera speaks)"

I walk alone, although the way is long,
And with gaunt briars and nettles overgrown;
Though little feet are frail, in purpose strong
I walk alone.

Around me press unknowing and unknown
In lampless longing the insensate throng,
Seeing but the shadow that my star has thrown.

Across the sundering seas my heart's wild song
Wakes in your joy for my joy, moan for moan.
What if, when Life on Love can wreak no wrong,
I walk alone?

According to Vera´s transcription of the poem kept at McMaster University (Ontario, Canada), the poem was written by Leighton the 24th of August 1914, so it was written seven months before Leighton left for the war (March 1915). The Great War had already begun, but very recently, only a month ago (on the 28th of July 1915). While Bishop and Bostridge give the complete title of the poem, "Roundel (Vera speaks)", Holt et al., however, give the incomplete title of "Roundel", which brings them to the wrong conclusion that the poem deals with "the lonely, tormenting path that the poet

was treading" [65]. Therefore, I agree with Keyser that "more likely Leighton was imagining (ahead) what it would be like for Brittain if he died" (*Keyser*, 56).

The title of the poem "Roundel" relates to the English poetic composition of eleven lines, derived from the French *rondeau*. It is generally composed by three stanzas, in which lines 4 and 11 make up the refrain, providing the poem with a circular structure by repeating in these lines the words that begin the poem. The roundel form was introduced by the English poet Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909), whose work Leighton admired.

In Leighton´s poem, all the lines, except 4 and 11, are written in iambic pentameter. The words "I walk alone" open the poem, reappear in line 4 and close the poem in line 11, providing the circular structure mentioned above. Therefore, this reiteration emphasizes what is most important in the poem: Vera is walking alone.

In the poem, the lyrical subject borrows Vera´s voice, and again we find the dialogic device so often used by Leighton in his poems, as her voice works as a monologue in the poem, in an imaginary but realistic future, of wait and uncertainty.

In "Roundel" Leighton dramatizes the worries about his future separation, but he also shows his feminist ideas when he assumes the role of a woman in the poem, and represents her as active and as hard-working as a man. A woman who, in spite of the suffering she experiences, keeps on walking in the middle of a severe, harsh nature, full of difficulties and obstacles: "I walk alone, although the way is *long*,/ and with *gaunt briars* and *nettles overgrown*". The plants described in the poem are not precisely delicate nor kind: briars and nettles hurt the skin producing rashes and scratches. What pushes her to go on and overcome the obstacles is her hope and her internal strength,

[65] Tonie Holt et al., *Violets from Oversea. Poets of the First World War* (Michigan: Leo Cooper, 1996), p.50.

despite her appearance and fragile constitution: “Though *little* feet are *frail*, in purpose *strong*” (an anthithesis – my italics). The female figure is, therefore, represented as brave, independent and forward.

This is the first of Leighton´s poems to introduce the presence of war and beyond that, the female perspective on the war.

The second stanza darkens the tone of the poem as the loneliness of the protagonist is stressed by the multitude that surrounds her, not knowing of her suffering: “Around me press, unknowing and unknown, / in lampless longing the insensate throng,/ seeing but the shadow that my star has thrown”. A physical, but also a psychological feeling of suffocation and darkness is created in the poem: *press, unknown, lampless, throng, shadow…*

The reference to a star in line 7, could be interpreted as a symbol of her fate or as the love that guides her through her lonely path, linked with the purposefulness she owns (line 3).

There is some kind of change on the perspective along the poem: the first stanza presents Vera walking alone in the midst of an arid nature, but with a firm step. In the second, the multitude appears on stage, and it is presented as insensitive and distant, unaware of the protagonist´s distress, while she herself does not pay attention to the multitude. To finish, the last stanza presents the love relationship between the young couple in times of war, the lover being introduced for the first time in line 9: “Wakes in *you* joy for my joy, moan for moan”.

Leighton appears already on the other side of the English Channel: “Across the sundering seas my heart´s wild song”. In this line we can see again the use of the alliteration of the /s/ with the intention of simulating the sound of the sea. We must

remember, at this point, that this device and the conception of the sound of the sea as a human lament was already present in his poem "Triolet": "There´*s* a *s*ob on the *s*ea, / And for what could not be/ The deep world-heart i*s* *s*ighing".

On the other hand, the element of the sea as symbol of distance and physical separation in the love relationship but, at the same time, as the only means of bridging the gap during the war, reappears in Leighton´s poem "Violets", written at the front: "Violets from oversea, / to your dear, far, forgetting land…"

The poem reunites some of the most characteristic features of Leighton´s poetry, such as the presence of nature, the reference to music, the dialogic device, etc.

Gradually, the poem turns more obscure, stress and pessimism grow from stanza to stanza. As Keyser states: "In the first stanza he [Leighton] hopes that she will keep on walking strongly, even though she is alone, but that turns into a question in the last stanza (…) Leighton wonders whether Brittain will be strong..." (Keyser, 56-57). Besides, the rhetoric question of the two last lines suggests the possibility that Leighton may die in combat. This question reflects both Leighton and Brittain´s own thoughts, fears and worries about their uncertain future.

It is interesting to take into account a letter that Brittain writes to Leighton in May of 1915, where she wonders about the time when the Armistice will be finally declared and whether she will celebrate it or whether she will be alone:

> I thought with what mockery and irony the jubilant celebrations which will hail the coming of peace will fall upon the ears of those to whom their best will never return, upon whose sorrow victory is built… I wonder if I should be one of those who will take a happy part in the triumph-or I shall listen to the merriment with a heart that breaks and ears that try to keep out of the mirthful sounds. (*TY,* 460)

Moreover, in 1918, only a few years after Leighton´s death, Brittain wrote a poem titled "Roundel (died of wounds)", as a response to the homonymous one Leighton had written four years before:

Roundel (died of wounds)

Because you died, I shall not rest again,
But wander ever through the lone world wide
Seeking the shadow of a dream grown vain
Because you died.

I shall spend brief and idle hours beside
The many lesser loves that still remain,
But find in none my triumph and my pride;

And Disillusion´s slow corroding stain
Will creep upon each quest but newly tried,
For every striving now shall nothing gain
Because you died.[66]

Brittain wrote the poem in February of 1918, in France, where she was serving as a volunteer nurse.

In the poem, the lyrical subject that speaks is still Vera´s voice and the composition follows the same monologue structure of Leighton´s "Roundel". However, Brittain´s poem is darker and rawer than Leighton´s, for it is a confirmation of her

[66] Brittain, Vera. (1918). *Verses of a V.A.D.* London: Erskine MacDonald, p. 28.

worst foreboding while “walking alone” and it is also an answer to the ending question of Leighton´s poem. Her lonely walk was a possibility in Leighton´s poem, whereas in Brittain´s it is a reality.

Lines 1, 4 and 11, which constitute the poem´s refrain (“Because you died”) seem to respond to Leighton´s lines 1, 4 and 11, respectively (“I walk alone”). Therefore, Leighton´s death is what has caused her to walk alone.

We should also bear in mind that at the time that Brittain wrote the poem she had also lost two of her closest friends: Geoffrey Thurlow (who died in April 1917) and Victor Richardson (who died in June 1917). This poem reflects well the bitterness and sorrow Vera carried, the lingering shadows of all these losses.

Thus, the lines “But *wander ever* through the lone world wide. / Seeking the shadow of a dream grown vain” contrast with Leighton´s: “I walk alone, although the way is long/And with gaunt briars and nettles overgrown; / Though little feet are frail, *in purpose strong*”. While in Leighton´s poem, Vera still holds strength and hope to continue walking and facing all kind of adversities on the way; in Brittain´s, however, Vera appears to be aimlessly wandering, with no purpose to fight for, completely hopeless, as can be seen at the end of the poem: “For every striving now shall nothing gain/ Because you died.”

All is in vain now. Vera´s poem strikes a final note of despair that closes the dialogical exchange started by Leighton´s composition three years before.

3.4. "Violets"

Violets from Plug Street Wood,
Sweet, I send you oversea.

(It is strange they should be blue,
Blue, when his soaked blood was red,
For they grew around his head;
It is strange they should be blue.)

Violets from Plug Street Wood,
Think what they have meant to me
Life and Hope and Love and You
(And you did not see them grow
Where his mangled body lay
Hiding horror from the day;
Sweetest it was better so.)

Violets from oversea,
To your dear, far, forgetting land
These I send in memory,
Knowing You will understand.

This poem is considered to be Leighton's first real "war poem". Although titled "Violets" in the original manuscript, it is also referred to as "Villanelle" by Vera Brittain, or Leighton´s mother, Marie Connor Leighton. "Violets" was written in April of 1915 while Leighton was out in France, in the Western front. The story behind the poem reflects the author´s personal experience, his shock after finding the dead body of

a British soldier that had already started to be covered by vegetation. He writes about this event in his letter to Vera on 20th April 1915:

> Everything is in such grim contrast here. I went up yesterday morning to my fire trench, through the sunlit wood, and found the body of a dead British soldier hidden in the undergrowth a few yards from the path. He must have been shot there during the wood-fighting in the early part of the war and laid forgotten all this time. The ground was slightly marshy and the body had sunk down into it so that only the toes of his boots stuck up above the soil. His cap and equipment were just by the side, halfburied and rotten away. I am having a mound of earth thrown over him, to add one more to the other little graves in the wood… (*LG*, 86-87)

This "grim contrast" Leighton describes in the previous letter is key to understand his poem. It is very important to mention how relevant the landscape tends to be not only in his letters to Vera but in most of his poetry during the war, where nature and landscape become almost a personal space to escape from the war and its horrors, and which makes him feel somehow safer and closer to his home and its memories. There is always some kind of complicity with the landscape, seen as a shelter. Thus, he describes several times a pastoral quiet landscape that surrounds him in sharp contrast to a war scenario in his letters to Vera:

> I am sitting on the little wooden bench outside my dugout while the sun shines on the paper and a bee is humming round and round the bed of primroses in front of me. War and primroses! At the moment it does not seem as if there could be such a thing as war… (*LG*, 86)

> It is just after dawn and everything is very still. From where I am sitting I can see the sun on the clover field just behind the trenches and a stretch of white road beyond. There are birds singing in the wood on our left, and small curls of blue wood-smoke from the men´s fires climbing up through the trees. One of our Machine Guns has been firing single shots every few minutes with a cold and lazy regularity that seems singularly in harmony. Everyone else except the sentries is asleep. (*LG*, 92)

He shows astonishment and surprise as he is faced by two apparently contradictory worlds; it seems as if he is trying to make sense out of the coexistence of beauty and love with corruption and death: a reflection on how unreal, fragile and strange life and human condition can be.

In the afore mentioned letter Leighton wrote to Vera on the 20th of April 1915, he included some violets he had picked from the trenches in Plug Street Wood[67], just as we can read in "Violets".

Sending flowers was typical of the romantic correspondence between couples. However, the context from which the lyrical subject is sending them breaks away partly from this romantic, idyllic convention, as he does so from a trench in the midst of a war.

The poem itself creates the illusion of a letter in which we find a lyrical subject as the lover who is writing to his sweetheart. Nevertheless, there is a constant strain between the voice that is directed to the lover and the inner voice of the lyrical subject, a reflecting soldier speaking to himself and reflecting on his inmediate, bleak surroundings, whose bitter comments appear between parentheses.

It is important to stress how the use of parentheses in the second and third stanza of the poem creates a sort of parallel plot that helps to add intimacy and closeness to the lyrical subject´s own thoughts and feelings, working as a stream of conciousness[68],

[67] The town of Ploegsteert was colloquially known among British soldiers as Plug Street during the Great War. It was located in the Northwest of Belgium, which belonged to a sector of the Western front in Flanders.

[68] Narrative technique in nondramatic fiction intended to render the flow of myriad impressions—visual, auditory, physical, associative, and subliminal—that impinge on the consciousness of an individual and form part of his awareness along with the trend of his rational thoughts. The term was first used by the psychologist William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). It became widespread as a literary technique during the Modernist movement that flourished in the years just before and then after World War I (the early to mid 20th century). The literary use of parentheses can be seen, for instance, in Virginia Woolf´s novel *Orlando* (1928).

allowing the reader to access a more private space within the poem and therefore leading to the creation of pathos.

Furthermore, the use of parantheses constitutes an innovative device in Leighton´s poetry and reflects the fragmentary nature of "Violets", a feature that can be associated to Modernism and that brings Leighton´s poem closer to this movement. The fractured and disorderly nature of the experience of war and its contradictory surroundings urged writers to explore and seek for new structures and devices. As Randall Stevenson writes in his essay "Broken mirrors: the First World War and modernist literature" (2016):

> The First World War challenged not only pastoral imagination, but also many of literature´s established forms and devices (…) The colossal darkness and violence of the war scarcely allowed the world to be contained (…) Chaotic, unprecedented events required of modernist authors new literary languages: new ways of contemplating the world, and of mirroring it in their writing.[69]

The graphic sign of the parentheses acquires a particular visual relevance in "Violets", as all the atrocity of the scene appears to be enclosed between them, separated from the rest of the composition: *soaked blood, mangled body, horror…* as if the lyrical subject wanted to hide this rawness not only from Vera but from the reader as well.

In the poem we are confronted with a conventional romantic discourse with references to the lover (*Sweet, Sweetest*) and also to that correspondence: "I send you oversea", "To your dear, far, forgetting land, / these I send in memory…"

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[69] Stevenson, Randall. "Broken mirrors: the First World War and modernist literature" (2016), The British Library. Online at: https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/broken-mirrors-the-first-world-war-and-modernist-literature Hereafter cited in the text as *Stevenson.*

However, the last lines of the poem reveal how the poem goes beyond the love theme and breaks away from the idyllic, rural and harmonious athmosphere of pastoral poetry, to reflect on a human life that has been destroyed. Torn by war destruction, nature has lost its traditional power to console the poet, who tries to make sense of his contradictory surroundings. This way, Leighton´s "Violets" shows the first signs of Modernism. As Stevenson rightly points out:

> The First World War challenged the kind old friendship between imagination and nature- that long standing pastoral convention, especially beloved of poets since the Romantic period, of `beauty outside´ matching the mind within. Scepticism of this convention opened the way for the harsher, dispirited modernist poetry appearing in the 1920s.
>
> (*Stevenson*, 3)

The personal lone chant becomes a universal lament about the ephemeral human condition in "Violets". That "dear, far, forgetting land" which the poem refers to is at the same time that of the lyrical subject in the middle of a war, far away from home, and the one of the soldier that lies dead, unburied, forgotten on the ground, miles away from his native land and his people.

There is a need on the part of the lyrical subject to pay tribute to the British soldier, a need for him to be remembered, hence the elegiac mood of the poem. The violets he sends somehow succeed in taking part of the soldier´s memory back to the land where he belongs. The description of the place where the dead body of the soldier lies is absolutely pictorial: the red colour of the blood in contrast with the blue of the violets not only intensifies the scene, but produces an even greater contrast with the backdrop of war that we usually associate with brownish and grey colours, typical of rain, mud, smoke…

At this point of the analysis we should consider the surprising similarities we can find between Leighton´s "Violets" and Arthur Rimbaud´s "Le dormeur du val" (1870). In Rimbaud´s poem we also find the depiction of a young dead soldier lying on the grass, surrounded by flowers. Besides, the colour of the flowers is also blue and contrasts with the red colour of the man´s blood:

Un soldat jeune, bouche ouverte, tête nue,

Et la nuque baignant dans le frais cresson bleu,

Dort; il est étendu dans l'herbe

(…)

Les pieds dans les glaïeuls, il dort

Il a deux trous rouges au côté droit.[70]

On the other hand, Leighton's poem reveals the horror of the war to the reader and the loved one. The dismay felt by the lyrical subject is symbolised in the abandoned body of the soldier, covered by vegetation in front of the speaker, as if nature itself had intended to hide it. The feeling of anguish is depicted by means of the forgotten body, in decomposition: *soaked blood, mangled body, horror…*

The violets as symbol of the simplest beauty seem to counteract the horror of war. The contrast between life, love, beauty on the one hand and death, body´s decay and violence on the other, are present throughout the whole composition, where the

[70] It is interesting to point out how Fernando Pessoa´s poem "O menino da sua mae" (1926), also describes the dead body of a very young soldier lying on the ground, stressing the uselessness of war.

lyrical subject tries to understand their coexistence to find a means of coping with it, though he does not.

As is mentioned in the poem, there is a paralellism between the flowers and the loved one. The violets evoke the memory of her and, therefore, they symbolise at the same time "Life and Hope and Love and You"; beauty and innocence that enable him to be strong and hopeful in the midst of warfare and death.

Furthermore, the image of the verticality of the flowers that grow up contrasts with the horizontality of the dead body of the soldier, stressing again the contrast of life and death.

Besides symbolising romantic love, flowers are at the same time used to keep alive the memory of somebody who has passed away. On this respect, the last part of the poem raises the doubt of in whose memory the violets are actually sent to. Are they meant for the loved one as a memory of their love and of the time before the war or are they meant to be tokens in memory of the British soldier who did not receive burial and whose body was forgotten for months?

The structure of the poem belongs to the poetic French form of "villanelle". When presenting its charateristic structure, this form is composed by five triplets and one quatrain. However, during the Renaissance it was associated with Italian and Spanish dancing songs and it was written in free verse. It was not until later that it would adopt a more fixed structure. The subject matter of these poems is often pastoral. Despite its French origin, most villanelles were written in English from the 19th century onwards. In this type of compositions, both the first and the third lines are repeated in the following stanzas, intensifying the tone of the poem.[71]

[71] http://amandafrench.net/villanelle/?page_id=235

In Leighton´s poem we find the repetitions of the first and third lines in lines 6 and 7: "Violets from Plug Street Wood" and "It is strange they should be blue". This last line opens and closes the first brackets and it contributes to create the feeling of a recurrent, almost obsessive thought of the lyrical subject, who observes the scenario in shock and who tries to understand the contradiction of the dead body in contrast with the vivid landscape around him. This interior monologue appears between parentheses: "It is strange they should be blue, / Blue when his soaked blood was red; / For they grew around his head/ It its strange they should be blue". The lyrical subject strives to make sense of the growing of so much beauty, the blue colour of the violets in a death war scene and how to account for the mystery of the origin of the blue colour from the red blood shed by the soldier.

In the following parentheses, the poetical subject is aware of the impossibility of explaining the real dimension of his experience to his loved one, who can hardly imagine the horror of having seen the violets growing around the destroyed corpse of the soldier: "And you did not see them grow/ Where his mangled body lay,/ Hiding horror from the day (…)" This way, the poem becomes an attempt to reflect not only on the poet´s personal experience, but also on the terrible ordeal of the daily life of a soldier in the trenches, where he has to live side by side with death as a matter of routine. We witness how, by means of literary expession, he tries to convey an emotional experience to an absent interlocutor, in the hope of achieving something similar to silent complicity.

In the actual letter Leighton writes to Vera in April 1915 and which encloses the violets, the sending of the flowers aims at getting Vera closer to the reality of the war scene but, at the same time, reinforces the intensity of the poem, that he showed her later, when he returned home on leave, in August of 1915. The lyrical subject of the

poem is asking her to take his place, as if he had an absolute need of sharing the intensity of his contradictory feelings: “Think what they have meant to me”. The last line of the poem significantly resembles the last line of a letter: “Knowing you will understand” which, in reality, is not a statement, but a request, a wish.

However, at the same time, the lyrical subject seems to appreciate the fact that the horror of war can remain hidden from the eyes of the loved one, her ignorance of what is happening on the other side of the sea: “Sweetest, it was better so”.

The difficulty in communicating is stressed by the physical distance there is between the subject of the poem and the loved one: the English Channel, between England and France. We could already find a reference to the sea as symbol of distance and physical separation in the love relationship in Leighton´s poem “Roundel (Vera speaks)”: “Across the sundering seas my heart´s wild song”.

Finally, it is interesting to observe how flowers similar to violets have been frequently used in poetry written in English. This villanelle written by Leighton somehow seems to echo the narrative poem “When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom’d” written by Walt Whitman in 1865, a poem in which the American author uses lilacs as a symbol of life after death, depicting Abraham Lincoln’s last days within a war scenario:

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom’d,

and the great star early droop’d in the western sky in the night,

I mourn’d, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,

lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,

and thought of him I love.

(…)

Song of the bleeding throat,

Death's outlet song of life

(…)

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,

and the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,

I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war

but I saw they were not as was thought,

they themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,

the living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,

and the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd,

and the armies that remain'd suffer'd.[72]

It is also relevant to take into account that seven years after Leighton wrote "Violets", T.S.Eliot would write one of the most well-known poems of 20th century English literature, "The Waste Land", where in its first part, "The burial of the dead", he gets to condense in the first four lines all the sorrow and beauty of April, using the image of the lilacs as Spring emerging from death: "April is the cruellest month, breeding/ Lilacs out

[72] Whitman, Walt. *Poemas.* Spain: Editorial Lumen. 1969, p.109. Bilingual edition.

of the dead land, mixing/ Memory and desire, stirring/ Dull roots with spring rain."[73]

April was also the month in which Leighton wrote "Violets".

3.5. "Ploegsteert"

Love have I known, and dawn and gold of day-time,
And winds and songs and all the joys that are
Known once, and as a child that tires with play-time,
Leaped from them to the elemental dust of War.

I have seen blood and death, but all has ending,
And even Horror is but made to cease;
I am sickened with Love that lives only for lending
And all the loathsome pettiness of peace.

Give me, God of Battles, a field of death,
A Hill of Fire, a strong man´s agony…

The next poem we are going to address, "Ploegsteert", was written by Roland in May of 1915 in the village of Ploegsteert, while he was in the Western front in France, as the title itself shows. It is probably an incomplete work as Vera suggests in a letter to her brother Edward Brittain in January 14th, 1916: "I copied them all out. I don´t think any were meant to be in their finished state, and transcription with some was quite difficult, there were so many substitutions and alternative expressions...". (*LG*, 214)

[73] Daiches, David, *A Critical History of English Literature: The Romantics to the present day.* England: Secker & Warburg. 1969, Vol. 4, p. 1134.

In that same letter, Vera sends her brother her transcription of the poem, adding the following footnote: "The brackets words (A Hill of fire) were scratched out and something else evidently intended as a substitute for them" (*LG*, 304)

In the first lines of the poem we can find a symbolic enumeration (*Love, dawn, gold, winds, songs, joys*…) that evoke the bright, happy, quiet childhood days. Leighton´s lines somehow recall the last lines written by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado: "Estos días azules y este sol de la infancia" who also wrote them reflecting upon his own childhood from the distance of time and land in the middle of a war[74]. This enumeration is intensified by the repetition of the conjunction "and" which gives cumulative value to the elements of the poem (polysyndeton).

The lyrical subject evokes his past in the first person, a childhood that seems to have vanished sharply: "all the joys that are/ known once, and as a child that tires with playtime,/ leaped from them to the elemental dust of War". The use of the verb *leaped*, clearly reflects the abrupt change in which thousands of youngsters like Roland were involved. They passed directly from the school to the war and their youth was uprooted. As we mentioned in the previous section of this dissertation ("Juvenilia") "Ploegsteert" (1915) shows some common elements to one of Leighton´s first poems, "L´Envoi" (1913): "Only a turn of head, a goodbye lightly said, and you set out to tread your manlier road". (*LG*, 9)

[74] Antonio Machado (1875-1939) was one of the most important Spanish poets of the so-called "Generación del 98". The volumes *Soledades* and *Campos de Castilla* are among his major poetic creations. In 1939 Machado fled with his mother to France, escaping the increasing violence of the Spanish civil war. During the journey, he developed pneumonia and he died in Collioure (France) on the coast of the Mediterranean sea. His lines "Estos días azules, y este sol de la infancia", found in his coat´s pocket a few days afer he died, evoke childhood in the middle of a horrid war.

In “Ploegsteert”´s second stanza the subject expresses the reality of the war he is immersed in: *blood, death, horror, loathsome, pettiness*… which contrasts with *Love, dawn, gold, winds, songs, joys, play-time* of the first stanza. On the other hand, the subject, who has evoked his childhood before, now describes himself as sickened, as someone tired of waiting, weary…

Interestingly, we see how the feeling of sickness and disillusionment we find in the poem can also be found in some of the correspondence that Roland sent to Vera after he had only spent his first weeks in the trenches. In a letter dated 20th April, 1915 he writes: “There is nothing glorious in trench warfare. It is all a waiting and a waiting and taking of petty advantages - and those who can wait longest win. And it is all for nothing - for an empty name, for an ideal perhaps - after all”. (*LG,* 87)

In “Ploegsteert” the subject complains about his present situation and seems to wish the end of that horror. The promised peace and honour appear to be insufficient, as these actually fail to materialize. The poem perfectly mirrors the state of limbo in which the soldier finds himself. As T.S. Eliot would write in “The Wasteland”: “I could not speak, I was neither living nor dead…” [75]

Thus, in the last stanza of the poem, the voice of the soldier raises to that *God of Battles,* Mars, claiming for power and strength for the struggle, for the brave and noble death of a hero.

Victor Richardson, who had been one of Leighton´s closest friends at Uppingham along with Vera´s brother Edward, wrote his own comments on the poem in a letter written to Vera a few weeks after Leighton´s death:

[75] Eliot, T.S. *The Wasteland,* New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922.

> I can hear him saying some of those lines in conversation… `the elemental dust of War´ contrasted with `And all the loathsome pettiness of peace´ is a theme he often… discussed with me. All through the last part of his time at Uppingham he seemed to look and long for the stern reality of War and the elemental principles that War involves. He considered that in War lay our one hope of salvation as a Nation, War where all the things that do not matter are swept rudely aside and one gets down to the rock-bottom of the elementary facts of life. It was at times like these that I realise what a disappointment it was to him that his eyesight had prevented his entering the Navy. He loved to picture himself on his quarter-deck and seemed to revel in the awe and respect in which that is held: "saluting the quarter-deck" seemed to mean, in fact, meant to him something symbolical of all those virtues of Patriotism and Duty which he held most high. It was at times like these that he spoke of wishing to be "found dead in a trench at dawn" (…) the ideal conveyed in "Ploegsteert" is only too familiar. You say "Parts of them are on a level with, even perhaps beyond, Rupert Brooke" (…) to me there is none of Rupert Brooke´s bitterness and cynicism in his poems. If we leave out these qualities "Ploegsteert" reminds me very much of "Peace" and "The Dead"…
>
> (*LG*, 216-217)

All in all, the lyrical subject of the poem seems to be seeking his own transcendency, asking to be given back the ideal of the military (glory, honour, value…) he had been promised about war.

It is also important to remember how Leighton´s early views on the glamorous side of war, apart from being influenced by the military education he received at Uppingham Public School (as we have analysed more deeply in the Introductory chapter of this essay), were also clearly influenced by his admiration for Rupert Brooke, whom he had eagerly read during the war and whose 1914´s well known five war sonnets describe war as something idyllic, although Brooke had never had any first-hand experience of war as Leighton did. In July of 1915, Brittain had sent Leighton a copy of Rupert Brooke´s posthumously published volume *1914 & other Poems*. However, as

Harry Ricketts rightly points out in his book *Strange Meetings: The Poets of the Great War*[76] (2010) Brookes´s poetry had a troubling effect on Leighton:

> The poems made him feel dissatisfied rather than uplifted or even inured. They made him want "to write things myself", he told her, "instead of what I have to do here". They reminded him of an imaginative life away from the boredom of the billets and the danger of the trenches. The poems brought back "old forgotten things" and made him "so, so angry and impatient with most of the soul-less nonentities one finds around here". Reading the poems also prompted in Roland a reaction deeper than dissatisfaction (…) He too had once talked about "the Beauty of War", he admitted to Vera, but not now. War, he assured her, was only beautiful "in the abstract"; modern soldiering was really no different to being a greengrocer. Occasionally, he conceded, an individual might "rise from the sordidness to a deed of beauty: but that is all". The repudiation, the disgust, were directed at his own former naive aestheticising and idealising of war. Brooke and his sonnets were not explicitly arraigned, but the implication was there.[77]

In fact, Leighton´s "Ploegsteert" echoes Brooke´s war sonnet "The dead". Leighton´s images of a previous happy and vital youth, already gone in the present, and the repetition of the conjunction "and" can be seen in Brooke´s sonnet:

> These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
>
> Washed marvellously with sorrow, swift to mirth.
>
> The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
>
> And sunset and the colours of the earth.
>
> These had seen movement, and heard music; loved…

[76] Rickett, Harry. (2010). *Strange meetings: The poets of the Great War*. London: Chatto & Windus. The book has an interesting chapter titled "Rupert Brooke must have been rather like you" that explores the relationship between Roland Leighton and Vera Brittain viewed mainly from the perspective of their correspondence and some of their poetry.

[77] Rickett, Harry. (2010). *Strange meetings: The poets of the Great War*. London: Chatto & Windus, pp.44-45. Hereafter cited in the text as *Rickett.*

All this is ended. [78]

Moreover, at the end of Brooke´s poem, an idealization of the dead in war is produced: "He leaves a white/ unbroken glory, a gathered radiance, / a width, a shining peace, under the night". And it is that immortal glory the one that the soldier in Leighton´s poem seems to ask from the God of Battles.

However, Leighton´s idealistic views on war will be completely shattered by its brutality, leading him to a profound feeling of disappointment. In some of his later correspondence with Vera he will describe through harsh images the horror of being constantly surrounded by death. In one of the letters he sent to her in September of 1915, he writes: "Attempted a poem this morning beginning "Broken I came from out the Ditch of Death". Moreover, in that same month he wrote to Brittain what would probably be his most disillusioned and powerful condemnation of the war:

> I have been rushing around since 4 a.m. this morning superintending the building of dug-outs, drawing up plans for the drawing of trenches, doing a little digging myself as a relaxation, and accidentally coming upon dead Germans while looting timber from what was once a German fire trench. This latter was captured by the French not so long ago and is pitted with Shell-holes each big enough to bury a horse or two in. The dug-outs have been nearly blown in, the wire entanglements are a wreck, and in among this chaos of twisted iron and splintered timber and shapeless earth are the fleshless, blackened bones of simple men who poured out their red, sweet wine of youth unknowing, for nothing more tangible than Honour or their Country's Glory or another's Lust of Power. Let him who thinks that war is a glorious golden thing, who loves to roll forth stirring words of exhortation, invoking Honour and Praise and Valour and Love of Country with as thoughtless and fervid a faith as inspired the priests of Baal to call on their own slumbering deity, let him look at a little pile of sodden grey rags that cover half a skull and a shine bone and what might have been its ribs, or at this skeleton lying on its side, resting halfcrouching as it fell, supported on one arm, perfect but that it is headless, and with the tattered clothing still draped around it; and let him realise how grand and glorious a thing it is to have distilled all Youth and Joy and Life into a foetid heap of hideous putrescence.

[78] Brooke, Rupert, *1914 and Other Poems*, England: Read Books, 2013, p.3. Hereafter cited in the text as *Brooke*.

> Who is there who has known and seen who can say that Victory is worth the death of even one of these?
>
> (*LG*, 165)

In this letter, Leighton expresses his critical view on that discourse of patriotic heroism while making a clear reference to lines by Rupert Brooke when he writes: "simple men who poured out their red, sweet wine of youth", which contains words that belong to the third war sonnet "The Dead", where Brooke extolles the virtues a soldier should incarnate when defending his country, such as honour, power and nobleness:

> These laid the world away; poured out the red
>
> Sweet wine of youth;
>
> Honour has come back, as a king, to earth.
>
> And Nobleness walks in our ways again…

(*Brooke*, 3-4)

This time Leighton uses the elements of Brooke´s poem, not as poetic inspiration, but as an instrument to rebel against the idealization of war. War made Leighton realize there was nothing glorious about dying in action; nothing glorious about dying young.

The raw crudity apparent in these war poems attests to the poet´s genuine embrace of the reality he was inmersed in, notwithstanding the recognition that it belied his previous beliefs and hopes regarding the war.

The poems analysed in this section were written by Leighton between his last months at school and his death at the front (from April 1914 to November 1915). In them we find many of the characteristics of Leighton´s earlier work, such as the acute sense of the pictorial or the important presence of nature.

However, with the outbreak of war and Leighton´s first-hand experience of it, the irruption of the darkest aspects of life takes place. Themes such as loss, death, war, violence or destruction appear in poems like "Roundel", "Ploegsteert" or "Violets". The latter constituting the seed of change in his poetic work, as we witness the poet´s conflict with the contradictory reality of war, questioning the traditional pastoral view of the Georgian poets (Rupert Brooke, John Masefield…). In these three poems, the cynical and ironic tone of Leighton´s last work is forged, bringing forward the bitterness and the pessimism of his latest poems "Dust, only dust" or "For I shall be born in a brothel".

4. Fragmentary Poems and "Vale"

4.1. Fragmentary Poems: "Goodbye" & "Dust, only dust"

Some fragments of Leighton´s poems have survived. These were found among the ones he kept in his black notebook[79], which was returned together with his uniform to the Leighton family after his death, as it is recorded both by Brittain (see *LG*, 213) and by Leighton´s sister, Clare: "She [Marie, Leighton´s mother] lay reading some of these poems that had been returned to us with Roland's belongings from France…" [80]

4.1.1. "Goodbye"

Goodbye, sweet friend. What matters it that you
Have found Love´s death in Joy, and I in sorrow?
For, hand in hand, just as we used to do,

[79] Leighton´s original notebook has not survived. Vera was visiting the Leighton family in Lowestoft the same day Roland´s belongings were returned from France, so she copied Leighton´s poems out in her own notebook. Vera´s original transcriptions of Leighton´s poems are now kept at McMaster University, Ontario, Canada.

[80] Leighton, Clare. *Tempestuous Petticoat: The Story of an Invincible Edwardian.* London: Gollancz, 1947, p.232.

We too will live our passionate poem through

On God´s serene to-morrow.

The first poem we are going to address is the fragmentary poem titled "Goodbye" that Leighton gave Brittain just before going to the front (March 1915) and which she referred to in *Testament of Youth:*

> So I finished up the miserable morning by looking through some of the short verses that he had left with me, and especially one in which -as in two or three of his poems- some prophetic instinct led him to a truer knowledge of the future than the strong, dominant consciousness that felt certain of survival. (*TY*, 134)

The poem was, however, written on May 19th, 1914, according to Brittain´s own transcription of Leighton´s poem from his notebook.[81]

The last lines of the poem appear several times in Leighton´s letters to Brittain as a way of expressing certainty that they would meet again. Moreover, they tend to appear in Leighton´s correspondence in moments of crisis or strong feeling. For instance, before leaving to the front, in a letter written in Maldon, 19th of March 1915, Leighton writes to Vera:

> And all that is left is to wait and work and hope. But I am coming back, dear. Let it always be "when" and not "if". As yet everything is incomplete: but last night, unreal as it seems to be, must have some consummation. The day will come when *we shall live our roseate poem through*- as we have dreamt it. (*LG*, 59-60)

Only a few weeks later, already in France, on the 3rd of April 1915, Roland ends his letter to Vera with the line "Till tomorrow". And months later, just before returning to the front in August 1915, after his summer leave, he will send Vera the following

[81] Vera Brittain Archives, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

telegram: "Till we may live our *roseate* poem through" (*LG*, 145); softening again the word "passionate" from the original.

Then, on the 7th of September 1915, he quotes the last three lines of the poem making a slight but significant change in the last line, substituting the word "God" of the original for "some": "On *some* serene tomorrow" (*LG*, 161)

Therefore, this code is used to evoke "a larger context, a backstory; it wasn´t just a romantic saying but a message laden with memories of a specific parting, a vision of a love that transcended death, and, not incidentally, an admission that Roland might well die." [82]

Significantly, Leighton´s "Goodbye" opens Brittain´s book of poems *Verses of a V.A.D*[83], dedicated to the memory of Roland and published only a few years after his death, in 1918.

"Goodbye" depicts love as eternal in a similar way in which W. E. Henley´s poem "A wink from Hesper" (quoted several times in Leighton´s and Brittain´s correspondence) reflects a re-encounter after death: "Goodnight, sweet friend, goodnight: / till life and all take flight, / never goodbye".[84]

As we have already mentioned in this essay, the afterlife was a recurrent topic in Leighton´s and Brittain´s conversation and correspondence. The subject (already echoed

[82] R. Fryer, Darcy. "Codes" (2016). Online at testamentofyouth.wordpress.com. The site, ran by a historian, is devoted to Brittain´s autobiographical novel *Testament of Youth*.

[83] Brittain, Vera. (1918). *Verses of a V.A.D*. London: Erskine MacDonald. It was the first poetry book Vera published and it was dedicated to the memory of Leighton. The book contained a foreward by Leighton´s mother Marie Connor Leighton and several of its poems were inspired by Vera´s relationship with Leighton such as "St Pancras Station, August 1915", "To Monseigneur", "Perhaps" or "Roundel: Died of Wounds".

[84] Henley, William Ernest. *Echoes of Life and Death*, Portland: Thomas B. Mosher, 1908, p.54.

in Leighton´s poem "Nachklang" of April 1914) will reappear in the only real moment of intimacy the couple shared during Leighton´s leave in Lowestoft, in August 1915, as they sat alone on the cliff path facing the sea:

> We were talking quite impersonally on our old subject of the possibility or non-possibility of a future life (…) Roland arguing that we were probably entirely physical after all and that our personality depended on no more than the more or less of grey matter that composed the human brain. But he again confessed that this explanation could not be made to fit the soul´s striving after impersonal aims. (…) It is only in human nature to hope for a Hereafter, to wish that this vital sensitive thing that is one´s self may not cease to be –still more that what it loves may continue also…
>
> (*CoY*, 253)

Their conversation was recorded by Vera in her diary, where she also reflects on the human impossibilitiy to get to know if there is something after tangible life, making a reference to Schreiner´s novel *The Story of an African Farm:* "No conversation, no argument, no discussion, even his and mine, can bring light to penetrate *the veil of terrible mist over the face of the Hereafter*." (*CoY,* 253) A sentence that belongs to the following excerpt from the novel:

> The body was dead now, but the soul, clear and unclouded, looked forth. Then slowly, without a sound, the beautiful eyes closed (…) Had she found what she sought for- something to worship? Had she ceased from being? Who shall tell us? There is a veil of terrible mist over the face of the Hereafter. (*Schreiner*, 252-253)

The novel explores, among many other things, the question of the metaphysical identity of the human being in front of god and death, anticipating, this way, the philosophical movement of existencialism. Significantly, *The Story of an African Farm*, according to Victor Richardson in a letter written to Vera after Roland´s death, "seemed to be like a key to his [Leighton´s] character". (*LG*, 217)

Leighton showed an attraction towards spirituality that was also recorded by Vera during his leave at Lowestoft: "He says that the idea of being nothing at all has an irresistible attraction for him. Into that phase of his nature I cannot enter, for in all my changes of mood I never feel that…" (*CoY*, 254)

Furthermore, Vera quotes in that same entrance of her diary part of Leighton´s poem "Goodbye" when she reflects: "I sometimes feel that if only I could know that `hand in hand just as we used to do we two shall live our passionate poem through in some serene tomorrow´, I should not be troubled very much by an absolute certain denial of the inmortality of the soul..." (*CoY*, 253)

"Goodbye", although being a fragmentary love poem, shows Leighton´s characteristic use of the dialogic device as well as his concern with the main subjects of human nature: life, love and death, present in the finished poems analysed in the previous sections of this dissertation. At the same time, "Goodbye" is a poem that may reflect Leighton´s early attraction to religion and spirituality (also explored in his poem "The Crescent and the Cross"), as well as help us understand better his later conversion to Catholicism while he was at the front.

4.1.2. "Dust, only dust"

Dust, only dust, and passion´s foetid breath
Dear love´s young death,
For in one little hour that has been done
Which no hope-granted pardon pitiful
No life hereafter fairer than the sun
No, not Eternity, can e´er annul.

The second fragmentary poem we are addressing in this section is undated. Furthermore, there is no trace of any reference to these lines from Vera except for her only transcript of the poem in her notebook, where she adds the following note to the transcription: "Poems discovered in a note-book 18 months after his death" [85]

One feels inclined to think the poem was written by Leighton in the last months that he spent at the front, for it has a pessimistic and cynical tone very much in consonance with his latest correspondence, in which he expresses disillusionment and bitter irony towards his earlier idealistic views on war.

Brittain´s account on Leighton during his first leave in August 1915 (after he had spent five months at the front) already shows a physical as well as a psychological change: with an `inward abstraction´, aloofness as well as detachment, he is also described as `thinner, older, very military in his uniform, and had acquired a premature air of having knocked about the world´ [86]

When Brittain and Leighton said goodbye at St Pancras in August 1915 `he [Leighton] said very bitterly that he didn´t want to go back to the front, and this glimpse of England and real life had made him hate France more than ever.´ (*Rickett*, 46)

Back at the front, on the 6th of September, Leighton wrote to Vera `England and you seem very far away today´ (*LG*, 160) He also added: "I know of nothing more melancholy and depressing than an old trench, disused and overgrown with grass, with dug-outs fallen in or wrecked by shells, and here and there a forgotten grave and a rusty bayonet. Of such is the glorious panoply of war!" (*LG*, 160).

[85] Vera Brittain Archives, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.
[86] Quoted in Rickett, Harry. (2010). *Strange meetings: The poets of the Great War*. London: Chatto & Windus, p.45. Hereafter cited in the tex as *Rickett.*

The following day he wrote to Vera:

> I wonder sometimes which I am born to be, a man of action with lapses into the artistic, or an artist with military sympathies. Mother has asked me once or twice lately whether I should like to go into the Regular Army as a profession, I say no because I foresee the atrophy of my artistic side. On the other hand a literary life would give no scope for the adventurous and administrative facet of my temperament. What am I to do ?...
>
> (*LG*, 161)

Leighton´s return to England during his summer leave must have reawakened his intellectual and artistic side as well as old memories. As Berry and Bostridge point out in their book *Vera Brittain: A Life* (1996): "His return home from the trenches must indeed have seemed to him like coming to another planet, with precious little time to readjust before he went back again." (*VB*, 83) Leighton´s leave may have occassioned the onset of a depressive state and an inner conflict.

Leighton, who wrote to Vera very regularly, shows a growing detachment as his letters become less and less frequent. On the 18th October he wrote to Vera the following: "You must be wondering what has become of me by now. Such a very long time without a murmur of any kind… I am getting absorbed in my little world here. It is the only way to stifle boredom and regrets." (*LG*, 178)

Although Vera wrote to him several times a week in between her work as V.A.D. he remained silent for weeks:

> His short spell of leave had pained and distressed him, and his mother had recognized the serious effect which this brief glimpse of home might have on his state of mind. It is not difficult to understand how he might have decided that the only way to make his existence tolerable was to try to block out memories of everything and everyone left behind him in England, and to live only for the immediate present. This was a common enough response of those exposed to conditions on the Western Front, even for a matter of weeks. It was what one

> French combatant described as the *automatisme anesthésiant* of the trench experience, a withdrawal into oneself and a gradual numbing of emotion. Daily life was reduced to the level of a series of reflexes in which the instinct of self-preservation and, in the case of a conscientious officer like Roland, the welfare of one´s men, overtook all other concerns. The individual, in André Bridoux´s striking phrase, was crushed "by the necessity of the hour". (*VB*, 88)

As previously analysed in this essay, it is in Leighton´s letter to Vera of the 11th of September 1915 that he makes his most powerful rejection of war and of Brooke- style rhetoric, quoting Brooke´s third sonnet with bitter irony. In his letter, he describes the brutality of a scene he had found in the course of superintending the building of dug-outs: the remains of some dead Germans.

Leighton´s fragment "Dust, only dust" shares the same condemnation of war, the pessimistic tone, the lyrical subject´s realization of what a waste of life and youth it was and the lie of all those promised ideals of honour, country´s glory and valour.

The poem is almost a draft, a reflection on the horror around him. *Death, dust, foetid breath* outstand over *young, passion* and *love,* opposing them at the same time. The first lines of the fragment "Dust, only dust, and passion´s foetid breath/ Dear love´s young death" connects with part of the passage of the above mentioned letter, written to Vera on the 11th of September 1915: "to have distilled all Youth and Joy and Life into a foetid heap of hideous putrescence." (*LG*, 165)

Leighton´s fragment also condemns the idealized death of the young soldier in the war, already glorified by Brooke in his sonnet "The dead": "He leaves a white/ Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance, /A width, a shining peace, under the night."

It is interesting to point out, on the one hand, how this fragment contrasts with the one titled "Goodbye", where the possibility of a reencounter beyond death was represented as encouraging. In "Dust, only dust", however, the lyrical subject tells

himself (by means of the anaphora of the adverb "no") that there is no religious forgiveness, nor an afterlife, not even an eternity, that could compensate for the loss of a whole life.

This same hopeless and heartbreaking mood about the loss of youth is found in one of the last letters Leighton wrote to his mother, Marie, scarcely two weeks before he died. The letter shows Leighton´s depressive state of mind and identity crisis [87]:

> I seem to be very much cut off from everything and everybody just lately. Sometimes I rather exult in it; sometimes I wonder how much of the old Roland is left. I have learnt much; I have gained much; I have grown up suddenly; I have got to know the ways of the world. But there is a poem of Verlaine´s that I remember sometimes:
>
> "O, qu´as tu fait, toi que voilà,
> Pleurant sans cesse?
> Dis, qu´as tu fait, toi que voilà,
> De ta jeunesse?"[88]

[87] The letter, dated 10th December, 1915, France, is included in Marie Leighton´s novel *Boy of my Heart.* See Leighton, Marie. (1916). *Boy of My Heart* (published anonymously). London: Hodder & Stoughton, pp.15-16.

[88] "What have you done, O you there/ Who endlessly cry, /Say: what have you done there/ With Youth gone by?" (English version by A.S. Kline).

4.2. "Vale"

And so, farewell. All our sweet songs are sung,
Our red rose-garlands withered;
The sun-bright day
-Silver and blue and gold-
Wearied to sleep.

The shimmering evening, like a grey, soft bird,
Barred with the blood of sunset,
Has flown to rest
Under the scented wings
Of the dark-blue Night.

The final poem we are going to address in this essay was written by Leighton, according to Vera, "just before the War" (*TY*, 172). "Vale" is, in fact, dated 19th May of 1914[89]. The reason why we have decided to include this poem in the last section of this dissertation is because it includes many of the characteristics of Leighton´s poetry, in spite of the fact that it was not one of the last poems he wrote. Besides, it achieves an essential composition that presents various features of literary Impressionism[90], direct predecesor of Imagism[91].

[89] According to Vera´s own transcription of the poem kept at McMaster University, Ontario, Canada.

[90] The depiction of scene, emotion, or character by details to achieve a vividness or effectiveness more by evoking subjective and sensory impressions than by recreating an objective reality.

[91] A poetic movement in England and America between 1912-1917 that sought clarity of expression through use of precise visual images, "hard light, clear edges", coined in 1912 by Ezra Pound.

"Pictorial Impressionism, on which literary Impressionism based itself, has to do with a way of building up a unified impression of light (or meaning or mood) by first breaking the subject into specific energy-filled fragments." (cf. *Scott*, 218)

Among the proper characteristics of Impressionism, we can highlight one as fundamental: the attempt to retain, to capture the ephemeral. Fleetingness approached is shown to comprise a collection of momentary stillnesses (*Scott*, 219). That is why it is so frequent to find pictures that recreate specific moments among the impressionist painters: *Sunrise* (1872), *Waves breaking* (1881), *Dusk in Venice* (1908) from Monet; or paintings such as *Morning Sunlight on the Snow* (1895) and *Spring, Morning, Cloudy, Eragny* (1900) from Pisarro. In fact, the same scene was painted at different times of day or under different weather conditions in order to capture the particular light and colours of a particular moment of day or season. In 1897, Pisarro painted the Boulevard Montmartre in winter and in spring, the same as Monet did between 1892 and 1894 in his well-known series of the Rouen cathedral. Degas, another impressionist French painter, captured the movement of the human body in his famous paintings of dancers: the gesture of a leg or an arm raising in the air in paintings like *Ballet rehearsal* (1873), *Dancer tilting* (1883), etc.

This same attraction to translate the transient impression, the fleeting hue of things, in order to express the hidden relations among them can be found in "Vale", where the sunset floods the whole poem, mixing colours, textures… and where language seems to want to adapt to these sensory nuances. A common feature to be found in impressionist literature is the substantivation of verbs and adjectives, present in the poem: "The sun bright-day/ *Silver* and *blue* and *gold*". This should be contrasted with Leighton´s poem "In the Rose-Garden" where he, instead, had kept the adjectives: "Noon and a scented glory, /*Golden* and *pink* and *red"*. Another impressionist feature is

the juxtaposition of images, also found in the poem, where the evening becomes a "grey, soft bird", converging both images one into another. On the other hand, the enjambement in the last three lines of the poem gives the reader the sense of fluidity without any syntactical break. In fact, it is rather significant how impressionist poems tend to weed out particles and conjunctions in order to keep a constant flow. Therefore, the use of semi-colons (lines 2 and 7) and an important decrease in the use of the conjunction "and", so much used by Leighton in most of his poems, and here only appearing in lines 1 and 4.

Rilke called Impressionism the "pantheism of light"[92], as it happened in painting, in literature light scintillates across the scene without bias, and clings to any obstacle (*Scott*, 223). In "Vale", light also plays a main role, present from the third line to the last. We find some adjectives referring to the light (*bright, shimmering, dark*) but also some nouns like *sun, sunset* or the metals, *silver* and *gold*, that shine and catch the light. The day, along the poem, goes through different nuances in colour as the evening grows older: turning silver and grey first, then gold, followed by an intense red, minutes before the dark blue of the night reigns over. The colour range we can find along the poem would be as follows: red (roses) >silver>blue>gold>grey>dark-red (blood) >dark-blue.

Impressionists didn´t aim to define reality precisely, but to capture its essence in terms of sensations, therefore the importance of the sensorial world. The Spanish poet and art critic Juan Eduardo Cirlot, referred to Impressionism as a complete synaesthesia, due to the predominance of sensation in the works of art of this movement:

[92]`Impressionisten´, 1898, apud *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, London, Penguin Books, 1991.

> En sus improvisaciones el impresionismo tendía, acaso sin consciencia de ello, a una *sinestesia total*, en lo que coincidía con las aspiraciones simbolistas, solamente que en el primero el proceso se cumplía por una embriaguez ante la naturaleza, de carácter predominantemente sensorial, mientras que el simbolismo aspiraba a un tipo de creación más rigurosamente ordenado y preconcebido... Por medio del impresionismo, el siglo XIX y el XX se fundían en esa playa donde el flujo se llama romanticismo y el reflujo modernismo. [93]

The use of synaesthesia was, without any doubt, a device that allowed to offer a more complex and multiple perception of reality. In Leighton´s poem, this device can be seen in *sweet* songs, *soft* evening, *scented* wings…

Apart from the sensory elements that we find in the poem, not to mention those alluding to colour that we have referred to above, we also find some related to the sense of smell (*rose-garlands, withered, scented),* to touch (*soft*), to taste *(sweet*) and to hearing (*songs, sung, bird*). In this respect, it is also important to underline the use of alliteration in the poem, as can be seen in the first line: *s*o, *s*weet, *s*ongs, *s*ung.

The objective is, therefore, to apprehend the moment, the subjective sensation of a particular moment, in the case of Leighton´s poem: the dusk.

Besides the synaesthesia (overlapping of sensory impressions) and the alliteration (sound effect), another impressionist technique that we can find in poetry is the prosopopoeia (animation effect). In "Vale" the day is *wearied to sleep* and the evening *has flown to rest*. Besides, the latter is compared to a bird and it is attributed some of its qualities. On the other hand, the sunset owns *blood,* just as any living being does, and the Night (its first capital letter stresses its animation) has *wings,* again, a characteristic feature of a bird.

[93] Cirlot, Eduardo Juan. *Diccionario de los ismos*, Siruela, 2016.

It is also important to mention how in Impressionism a conjunction between the poet and the landscape takes place (as happens in "Vale"), but without expressing any feelings as had happened in Romanticism.

The tendency towards the accumulation of cromatic and sensory nuances, juxtaposition and the frequent lack of links give the impressionist text the appearance of a diary, with images, impressions and scenic brush-strokes. This apparent fragmentation responds to the way the world was seen at the end of the 19th century, where the vital conception ought to be the answer to a series of impressions linked together by the conciousness of an individual: "Literary Impressionism may be regarded as the early manifestation of the peculiarly modern plight of an exploded consciousness caught in a fragmented universe". (*Scott,* 224)

Impressionism is a suggestive art (not a descriptive one) that makes use of evocation to abstract a meaning. According to Clive Scott, it is "a means rather than an end, a means of expressing the process of exploration as a process, a means of groping among phenomena for the revealing detail or combination that would call forth the absent subject, a means of reducing essence from circumstance" (*Scott*, 225)

We can already trace some impressionist tendencies in Leighton´s letters as well as in the early article he wrote for Uppingham´s *The School Magazine* in June 1913, "An old seaport town". An article which seems to echo some of the themes and pictorial eye to detail of the French impressionist novel *An Iceland Fisherman* by Pierre Loti (1902), one of Leighton´s favourite novels[94].

It is interesting to notice how from the very beginning of the piece, Leighton seems to distance himself from the romantic writing style:

[94] See Brittain, Vera, *Testament of Youth* (2014) London: Orion Publishing Group, p.248.

> The old seaport town of Ymuiden is not picturesque in the way that the conventional old seaport presents itself to the romantic novelist. It is not perched on the side of a cliff abounding in smuggler´s caves, full of dark alleys and corners, and peopled chiefly by old weather-beaten salts, who divide their whole day equally between smoking a clay pipe and spinning nautical yarns of questionable veracity. [95]

Further on, he begins to describe the town, occasionally giving a colour fine brush-stroke here and there, in order to outline a particular detail in the scene:

> Where the town is approached from the sea, the first thing that catches the eye is a little red lighthouse standing out in sharp contrast to the deep green of the surrounding dyke-enclosed country. Not a human being is in sight, till, after passing a short distance up the canal separating Ymuiden from the North Sea, a bend in the waterway discloses the little town itself, and the harbour crowded with red-sailed fishing smacks, on which quaintly dressed fishermen are busy arranging their tackle or unloading their cargo.[96]

Many of the letters Leighton writes to Brittain have an undeniable aesthetic quality. In them, we observe the attention to detail as well as their contemplative nature. Nevertheless, there are two of them, in particular, that resemble the intensity of colours, the melancholy and the ephemeral quality of the dusk depicted in his poem "Vale". The first one was written by Leighton in July 1915, the second one in November of that same year, a month before he died.

> The sky was wonderful as we came along an hour ago –*deep blue* with *mackerel spots of light gold* clouds in the west *meshed like chain armour on a blue* ground, and below in the horizon a long bar of cloud so *dark* as to look *purple* against the sun. Why are sunsets more beautiful normally than sunrise? (*LG*, 132)

[95] Leighton, Roland. "An old seaport-town", *The School Magazine*, June Issue 1913, Uppingham School Heritage Archives, p.137.

[96] Leighton, Roland. "An old seaport-town", *The School Magazine*, June Issue 1913, Uppingham School Heritage Archives, p.138.

> I don´t think that when one can still admire sunsets one has altogether lost the personality of pre-war days. I have been looking at *a bloodred bar of sky creeping down behind the snow*, and wondering whether any of the men in the trenches on the opposite hill were watching it too and thinking as I was what a waste of Life it is to spend it in a ditch. (*LG*, 191)

5. Conclusion

Having carried out the present analysis of most of Roland Leighton´s poetic work, we have now enough insight into his poetry to be able to find a sort of evolution in his brief, but valuable poetic work.

His work feeds on the British romantic poets, as reflected in his first youth poems, published during his school days in Uppingham´s *The School Magazine* (such as "Triolet" or "Clair de Lune"). In this first period, however, some of his poems already manifest his taste for a decadent aesthetic, present in the French symbolists, in Swinburne´s poetry or in the one written by Adela Florence Nicolson, under the pseudonym Laurence Hope*;* all of these authors are among his favourite readings. The presence of Orientalism and the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic in Leighton can also be noticed in poems such as "The Crescent and the Cross" and "On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz".

Notwithstanding the significant classic training Leighton received at Uppingham Public School in Rutland, from 1909 to 1914, many of his readings at that time reveal a great interest in modern literature: *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) by Olive Schreiner, *Walden or life in the Woods* (1854) by Henry David Thoreau, *An Iceland*

Fisherman (1886) by Pierre Loti, *Tess of the D´Urbervilles* (1891) by Thomas Hardy or *On the Eve* (1860) by Ivan Turgenev are among his readings.

Significantly, all these novels have some elements in common as is the case with human isolation, the presence of nature, the melancholy state of mind and the tendency for contemplation that we find in most of Leighton´s poems.

The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 contributed to the transformation of poetry in general. The pastoral element of traditional lyrical poetry is no longer useful to express the contradictory reality in which the young poet-soldier has to live. This new reality will be responsible and shape the fragmentary conception of Modernism. The conflict between the pastoral world and the distopic reality of the war and Leighton´s attempt to try to bring them together is magnificently reflected in his poem "Violets" (1915).

The initial, heroic and idealized vision Leighton had about the war was directly inherited from the military education system of English public schools at that time. On the other hand, the author´s mother, the novelist Marie Leighton, read to him works by Henry Newbolt, Conan Doyle, Quiller Couch or John Masefield, which also contributed to create this vision. The first poem published by Leighton in Uppingham´s *The School Magazine*, when he was 18, "L´Envoi" (1913), already reflects several of the values of manliness, courage, fame and camaraderie.

Another poem by Leighton, "Ploegsteert", written after two months at the front, in May of 1915, echoes some of Rupert Brooke´s famous 1914 sonnets (particularly "The dead") in which the value of honour and patriotism together with a heroic vision of death are praised. The reading of Brooke´s volumen, *1914 & other Poems*, that Brittain had given to Leighton, however, was met with growing rejection and

disenchantment towards the idealized vision of the battle. His direct contact with war, where the most absolute horror was part of his everyday life, made him understand its total falsity and uselessness. War had been reduced for him to a complete waste of human life, as he reports to Vera plainly in one of the letters he sends her in September of 1915, in which he also completely rebels against the values exalted by Brooke´s poetry that he had so fervently admired only a few months before.

In various of the last poems Leighton wrote, the subject of death and the image of the tomb appear recurently. Among these poems are "Dust, only dust" or the one recently found "For I shall be born in a brothel". The title of another poem he had started to write in September of 1915 and unfortunately missing today, is also revealing: "Broken I came from out the Ditch of Death". The pessimism and the ironic tone of the afore mentioned poems can also be found in the letters he sent to Vera during his last months at the front.

As we already mentioned in the introduction, at the point of completing the present essay and its submitting deadline, we received from Roland Leighton´s nephew, David Leighton, a copy of Vera´s transcriptions of Roland´s notebook (the one he brought to the front) which she titled "Poems discovered in a note-book 18 months after his death" (kept at the Vera Brittain Archive of McMaster University, Ontario, Canada). Among these transcriptions, there were some new fragments and poems written by Leighton. Unfortunately, as we have only had access to them at this very final stage, we were unable to consider this new material for the present essay. However, we plan to write a further study on this new material in the future that will be also accompanied by its translation into Spanish.

Lastly, we are very pleased to announce that the Spanish version of all the poems and fragments that have been studied in the present essay, will soon be published by El Desvelo Ediciones (Santander, Spain) in order to make Leighton´s poetry available to the Spanish reader.

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APPENDIX

I

ROLAND AUBREY LEIGHTON

Un llanto sobre el mar

(Selección, versión y notas: Paula Campos Fernández)

NOTE

We present here a selection of the poems written by the young British poet and soldier Roland Aubrey Leighton (1895-1915) between the years 1913 and 1915.

This first bilingual version in English and Spanish includes the majority of the complete poems that have been preserved. The source for the selection and subsequent translation was a booklet published by the poet´s nephew, David Leighton, in 1981.

We have decided to present the poems following a chronological and thematic order, with the purpose of letting the reader accompany the biographical as well as the poetic progression of the author: from his early poems written during his school years (most of them published in *The School Magazine*, the Uppingham Secondary School journal), through the love poems dedicated to Vera Brittain, to the last poems written at the front.

The general criterium that this translation followed was, above all, an attempt at respecting the general meaning of the poems, not necessarily maintaining the original rhyming features in the original texts, as in many occasions it meant forcing or violating their reading in Spanish. We have kept the rhyme only in those cases where it appeared natural in the Spanish language. We have attempted, however, to capture as much as possible the sound effects and musicality of the texts, both being essential aspects in the work of this author.

We hope that this first translation into Spanish of Roland Leighton´s poems will contribute to the recognition and appraisal of a poetic work that, in spite of being very short, given the untimely and unfortunate death of its author when he was only 20 years old, is nevertheless worth reading. The pictorial vividness and intensity of these poems together with the author's extraordinary sensitivity to capture the beauty of the ephemeral is worthy of consideration. We hope the reader of this translation enjoys the discovery of a poetic voice that, had it survived the Great War, would have become probably one of the significant voices among the English poets of the 20th century.

PAULA CAMPOS FERNÁNDEZ

NOTA

A continuación se presenta una selección de los poemas que el joven poeta y soldado británico Roland Aubrey Leighton (1895-1915) escribió entre los años 1913 y 1915.

Esta primera publicación bilingüe en ingles y castellano, recoge la mayoría de los poemas completos que se conservan del autor. La selección y posterior versión de los mismos se ha realizado a partir de una pequeña edición que llevó a cabo el sobrino del poeta, David Leighton, en el año 1981.

El orden en el que hemos decidido presentar la obra es a la vez cronológico y temático, con la intención de que el lector acompañe la trayectoria vital y poética del autor: desde los primeros poemas escritos durante su etapa escolar (la mayoría publicados en la revista *The School Magazine* del centro de secundaria de Uppingham), pasando por los poemas de amor dedicados a Vera Brittain, hasta los últimos poemas escritos en el frente francés.

El criterio general que ha primado en esta traducción ha sido respetar ante todo el contenido original de los poemas, evitando la obsesión de mantener la rima de los originales, puesto que en muchas ocasiones suponía forzar y violentar su lectura en castellano. Se ha procurado ser fiel en todo momento a la sonoridad y musicalidad del poema, aspectos esenciales en la obra de este autor. Tan sólo en aquellos casos en los que la rima ha surgido de forma natural en español, ésta se ha mantenido.

Esperamos que esta primera versión al castellano de los poemas de Roland Leighton contribuya al conocimiento y valoración de una obra poética que, si bien breve, dada la prematura muerte de su autor con tan sólo 20 años, asombra por su intensidad pictórica y extraordinaria sensibilidad para captar la belleza de lo efímero. Ojalá que el lector de esta traducción disfrute con el descubrimiento de una voz que, de haber sobrevivido a la Gran Guerra, se habría convertido en la de uno de los grandes poetas ingleses del siglo XX.

PAULA CAMPOS FERNÁNDEZ

Triolet

There´s a sob on the sea
And the Old Year is dying.

Borne on night-wings to me
There´s a sob on the sea,
And for what could not be
The deep World Heart is sighing.

There´s a sob on the sea,
And the Old Year is dying.

Triolet [1]

Hay un llanto sobre el mar,
y el año viejo se muere.

Llega con las alas de la noche hasta mí;
hay un llanto sobre el mar,
y el hondo corazón del mundo suspira
por lo que no pudo ser.

Hay un llanto sobre el mar,
y el año viejo se muere.

[1] `Triolet´: término de origen francés para designar una composición poética de ocho versos, cuyo primer verso se repite en los versos cuarto y séptimo, y el segundo aparece de nuevo cerrando el poema, que se ajusta al siguiente esquema métrico: abaaabab.

El poema fue publicado en la revista de Uppingham, *The School Magazine*, en diciembre de 1913.

L´Envoi

Only a turn of head,
A good-bye lightly said,
And you set out to tread
Your manlier road.

But our Youth's paths once met;
And think not we forget
How great a brothers' debt
To you is owed.

Sweep onward; and though Fame
Shall aureole your name,
Remember whence you came
In Boyhood days.

And in life's darkening years
Look back on hopes and fears
Mingled with memory's tears
And blame and praise.

L´Envoi [2]

Apenas sólo un giro de cabeza,
un adiós levemente pronunciado,
y partisteis en busca
del destino como hombres.

Pero nuestros caminos de juventud se cruzaron una vez;
y no penséis, compañeros,
que olvidaremos la inmensa deuda
contraída con vosotros.

Seguid caminando; y aunque la fama
llegue a coronar vuestro nombre,
recordad dónde vivisteis
los días de la infancia.

Y en los años más oscuros de la vida
mirad cómo las ilusiones y los miedos pasados
se mezclan con lágrimas de la memoria
y la culpa y la alabanza.

[2] ´L´Envoi´: término francés que designa envío, marcha o partida de algo."L´ Envoi" fue el primer poema publicado por Leighton en la revista *The School Magazine* de Uppingham, en el verano de 1913. Fue escrito con motivo de la graduación de los alumnos de último curso, a modo de despedida. Edward Brittain, hermano de Vera Brittain, músico y amigo íntimo de Leighton, compuso una partitura de piano con los versos de este poema. A pesar de que fue escrito un año antes de que estallara la Primera Guerra Mundial, el poema resulta asombrosamente profético.

Clair de Lune

Soft with the breath of flowers
And laughter of dead showers,
The passionate pale-lit hours
Encompass wood and lea;

And down the whispering river
The moon-bright dimples quiver
On waves that start and shiver
For fear to join the sea.

But when Night´s veil grows older,
Her subtle silence colder,
The poplar´s blackness bolder
Against the dawning sky.

New Day´s renascent embers
Make June´s dear dreams December´s;
And no one else remembers
Except the moon and I.

Clair de Lune [3]

Suaves por el aliento de las flores
y por la risa de lluvias pasadas,
las encendidas horas de luz pálida
envuelven el prado y el bosque;

y por el susurrante río bajan
los reflejos rizados de la luna
sobre olas que irrumpen y recelan
por miedo a unirse con el mar.

Mas cuando envejece la noche
y su silencio aún es más frío,
el negro de los álamos feroz
se vuelve contra el cielo que amanece.

Las brasas que el nuevo día enciende
unen los sueños de junio y diciembre;
y nadie lo recuerda
salvo la luna y yo.

[3] Claro de luna. Fue publicado en la revista *The School Magazine* de Uppingham en julio de 1914. El poema se inspira en la pieza de órgano del compositor alemán Karg Elert (1877-1933) "Clair de Lune", que fue interpretada el día de la graduación de Leighton, a quien conmovió profundamente por "su extraña frialdad y belleza".

On a Picture by Herbert Schmaltz

A face emmarbled, passionless, as one
Some Gorgon Fear has looked on, but her eyes,
Soft, limpid eyes with amethyst aglow
Like pools at sunrise, eyes beneath whose gaze
One fears to speak lest all their tenderness
Should melt into one iridescent tear…

Sobre un cuadro de Herbert Schmaltz [4]

Un rostro marmóreo, sin pasión, como de alguien
a quien hubiera mirado la terrible gorgona[5] y, sin embargo, sus ojos
son claros, húmedos ojos de fulgor amatista
como estanques al amanecer, ojos ante cuya mirada
uno no se atreve a hablar, temeroso de que toda su ternura
se funda en una sola lágrima irisada…

[4] Herbert Schmaltz (1856-1935) fue un pintor inglés de origen alemán asociado a la corriente del Prerrafaelismo. Fue amigo de artistas como William Holmant Hunt y Frederic Leighton. La mayoría de sus obras están relacionadas con esta escuela y el orientalismo. Aunque desconocemos el título y el cuadro en el que se inspiró Leighton para escribir este poema, probablemente se trate de alguno de los numerosos retratos femeninos que realizó el pintor.

[5] Figura perteneciente a la mitología griega, representada como un monstruo femenino alado de garras afiladas, cuya cabeza tenía serpientes en lugar de cabellos. Sin embargo, lo que la hacía aún más terrible era su mirada, que convertía a los hombres en piedra. Su presencia en la literatura del siglo XIX y XX está frecuentemente asociada al concepto de *femme fatale.*

In the Rose-Garden

Dew on the pink-flushed petals;
Roseate wings unfurled;
“What can, I thought, be fairer
In all the world?”

Steps that were fain but faltered
(What could she else have done?)
Passed from the arbour´s shadow
Into the sun.

Noon and a scented glory,
Golden and pink and red;
“What after all are roses
To me?” I said.

En el jardín de rosas [6]

Pétalos rosicler bajo el rocío;
como alas de rosa desplegándose;
-¿Qué puede haber- pensé- más bello
en todo el mundo?-

Unos pasos ligeros aunque indecisos
(¿qué otra cosa podría haber hecho ella?)
cruzaron desde la sombra del cenador
hacia el sol.

Mediodía y un esplendor perfumado,
dorado y rosa y rojo;
-¿Qué son, después de todo, -me dije-
las rosas para mí?-

[6] El poema evoca el encuentro entre Leighton y Vera en los jardines del instituto de Uppingham durante el *Speech Day*, el día de la graduación de Roland, el 11 de julio de 1914.

Nachklang

Down the long white road we walked together
Down between the grey hills and the heather,
Where the tawny-crested Plover cries.

You seemed all brown and soft, just like a linnet,
Your errant hair had shadowed sunbeams in it,
And there shone all April in your eyes.

With your golden voice of tears and laughter
Softened into song 'Does aught come after
Life,' you asked 'When life is Laboured through?
What is God and all for which we're striving?'

'Sweetest sceptic, we were born for living;
Life is Love, and Love is-
You, dear, you.'

Nachklang[7]

Bajamos juntos el largo camino blanco
entre las colinas grises y el brezo,
donde canta el chorlito de cresta rojiza.

Dorada y suave, tú, lo mismo que un jilguero,
tu cabello suelto oscurecía la luz del sol,
y todo abril brilló entonces en tus ojos.

Con tu sonora voz de lágrimas y risa
susurraste dulce un canto:
– ¿Qué hay tras una larga vida de trabajo?
¿Qué es Dios y todo aquello por lo que luchamos?[8]

–Dulce escéptica, hemos nacido para vivir;
la vida es el amor, y el amor es…
eres tú, querida, tú.

[7] Del alemán *nach* (después) y *klang* (sonido): eco, reverberación. "Nachklang" aparece datado el 19 de abril de 1914. El poema alude al largo paseo que dieron Leighton y Vera Brittain por el paraje llamado *Goyt Valley*, en los alrededores de Buxton, durante la estancia de Leighton en la casa de los Brittain. Su amigo Edward Brittain le había invitado a pasar parte de las vacaciones de Pascua. Fue entonces cuando tuvo lugar el primer encuentro entre Roland y Vera.

[8] Las conversaciones entre Roland y Vera abordaban frecuentemente el tema de la inmortalidad. La preocupación por la existencia de un más allá es especialmente recurrente en la correspondencia de ambos después de que Leighton se marche al frente.

Roundel (Vera Speaks)

I walk alone, although the way is long,
And with gaunt briars and nettles overgrown;
Though little feet are frail, in purpose strong
I walk alone.

Around me press unknowing and unknown
In lampless longing the insensate throng,
Seeing but the shadow that my star has thrown.

Across the sundering seas my heart's wild song
Wakes in you joy for my joy, moan for moan.
What if, when Life on Love can wreak no wrong,
I walk alone?

Roundel (habla Vera) [9]

Camino sola, aunque el camino es largo,

lleno de brezo áspero y ortigas;

aunque los pies son frágiles y pequeños, con paso decidido

camino sola.

Me rodea y arrastra una multitud insensible y ajena

que anhela sin luz, que no ve

más que la sombra que arrojó mi estrella.

A través de los mares que separan, el canto furioso de mi corazón

despierta tu dicha por mi dicha, tu llanto por el mío.

¿Y si, cuando ya herir no pueda al amor la vida,

camino sola?

[9] Composición poética inglesa de once versos, derivada del `Rondeau´ francés. Está generalmente compuesta por tres estrofas y sus versos cuarto y undécimo constituyen el estribillo, lo que otorga al poema una estructura circular al repetir estos versos las palabras del comienzo del poema. El ´roundel` fue introducido por el poeta inglés, Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909), uno de los poetas más admirados por Leighton.

En el poema, escrito por Leighton antes de marcharse al frente, el sujeto lírico adopta la voz de Vera, en un futuro imaginario pero realista, de espera e incertidumbre, donde Leighton aparece ya al otro lado del Canal de la Mancha. Leighton, a la vez que refleja las inquietudes acerca de su futura separación, deja entrever sus ideas feministas al asumir el papel de la mujer en el poema, y al representarla como activa e igual de luchadora que el hombre (una mujer que, a pesar del sufrimiento, sigue caminando). La interrogación retórica de los dos últimos versos arroja la posibilidad de que Leighton pueda morir en combate.

En 1918, sólo unos años después de la muerte de Roland, Vera Brittain escribió el poema titulado "Roundel (died of wounds)", en español: "Roundel (muerto por heridas de guerra)", como continuación o respuesta al que había escrito Leighton.

Violets

Violets from Plug Street Wood,
Sweet, I send you oversea.

(It is strange they should be blue,
Blue, when his soaked blood was red,
For they grew around his head;
It is strange they should be blue.)

Violets from Plug Street Wood,
Think what they have meant to me
Life and Hope and Love and You
(And you did not see them grow
Where his mangled body lay
Hiding horror from the day;
Sweetest it was better so.)

Violets from oversea,
To your dear, far, forgetting land
These I send in memory,
Knowing You will understand.

Violetas [10]

Violetas del bosque de Plug Street[11]

te envío, mi vida, al otro lado del mar.

(Es extraño que sean azules,

azules, cuando la sangre derramada era roja,

y habían brotado alrededor de su cabeza.

Es extraño que sean azules).

Violetas del bosque de Plug Street…

Imagina lo que han significado para mí:

vida y esperanza y amor y tú

(pero tú no las viste crecer

donde yacía su cuerpo destrozado

ocultando el horror del día;

mi vida, fue mejor así).

Violetas del otro lado del mar,

a tu querida tierra, lejana y sin memoria,

te envío como recuerdo.

Sé que lo entenderás.

[10] He decidido mantener el título "Violetas", siguiendo el que figura en el manuscrito original del poema: "Violets". Es, sin embargo, frecuente encontrar este poema bajo el título de "*Villanelle*", que hace referencia a su estructura métrica de origen francés, *villanelle*. El poema, escrito por Leighton en abril de 1915, surgió después de que el poeta encontrara una mañana el cuerpo sin vida de un soldado británico, abandonado y hundido en el barro. Leighton describe con detalle la escena en una carta que envía a Vera el 20 de abril de 1915, en la que incluye algunas violetas. Aunque el poema fue concebido con la idea de adjuntarlo en esa misma carta, Leighton no se lo mostrará a Vera hasta agosto de 1915, cuando obtiene el primer permiso militar. El poema fue publicado apenas un mes después de la muerte de Roland en el periódico británico *The Sphere*, en enero de 1916. El fundador del periódico, el crítico literario y periodista Clement Shorter (1857-1926), era amigo de la familia Leighton.

[11] Durante la Primera Guerra Mundial los soldados británicos utilizaban coloquialmente el nombre de Plugstreet Wood para referirse al bosque de *Ploegsteert*, un pueblo pequeño situado al este de Bélgica, muy cercano a Armentiéres (Francia). El regimiento de Leighton tuvo su base en Plugstreet durante el mes de abril de 1915, al participar en la batalla de Ypres.

Ploegsteert

Love have I known, and dawn and gold of day-time,
And winds and songs and all the joys that are
Known once, and as a child that tires with play-time,
Leaped from them to the elemental dust of War.

I have seen blood and death, but all has ending,
And even Horror is but made to cease;
I am sickened with Love that lives only for lending
And all the loathsome pettiness of peace.

Give me, God of Battles, a field of death,
A Hill of Fire, a strong man´s agony…

Ploegsteert [12]

He conocido el amor, y el amanecer y el oro del día,
los vientos y las canciones y todas las alegrías
que se conocen una vez y, como un niño que se cansa de jugar,
huí de ello hacia el polvo primitivo de la guerra.

He visto sangre y muerte, pero todo termina,
e incluso el horror acaba por cesar;
estoy cansado del amor que sólo vive de prestado
y de toda la aborrecible ausencia de paz.

Concédeme, dios de las batallas, un campo de muerte,
una colina de fuego, la agonía de un hombre fuerte...

[12] Véase nota 11. El poema fue escrito en mayo de 1915.

Hédauville

The sunshine on the long white road
That ribboned down the hill,
The velvet clematis that clung
Around your window-sill
Are waiting for you still.

Again the shadowed pool shall break
In dimples at your feet,
And when the thrush sings in your wood,
Unknowing you may meet
Another stranger, Sweet.

And if he is not quite so old
As the boy you used to know,
And less proud, too, and worthier,
You may not let him go---
(And daisies are truer than passion-flowers)
It will be better so.

Hédauville[13]

La luz sobre el largo camino blanco
que serpeaba la colina,
las clemátides de terciopelo que colgaban
de tu ventana
te esperan todavía.

De nuevo volverá el agua oscura
a rizarse bajo tus pies,
y cuando en tu bosque cante el mirlo,
sin darte cuenta, querida,
puede que encuentres a otro.

Y si su edad no alcanza
la de aquel al que conocías
y es menos orgulloso, y de más valía,
no le dejes marchar
(la margarita es más real que la flor de la pasión).
Así será mejor.

[13] Población y comuna al norte de Francia, en la región de Picardía, departamento de Somme. "Hédauville" fue probablemente el último poema que escribió Leighton, en noviembre de 1915, tan sólo un mes antes de su muerte. La batalla del Somme, la más larga y sangrienta de toda la Primera Guerra Mundial, tuvo lugar al año siguiente, de julio a noviembre de 1916.

Vale

And so, farewell. All our sweet songs are sung,
Our red rose-garlands withered;
The sun-bright day
-Silver and blue and gold-
Wearied to sleep.

The shimmering evening, like a grey, soft bird,
Barred with the blood of sunset,
Has flown to rest
Under the scented wings
Of the dark-blue Night.

***Vale*[14]**

Adiós, entonces. Ya cantamos nuestras dulces canciones;

marchitas están nuestras guirnaldas de rosas rojas.

El día luminoso

-plata, azul y oro-

se apaga, en busca del sueño.

La tarde resplandece,

atravesada por la sangre del ocaso,

como un pájaro suave y gris que vuela

para descansar bajo las alas perfumadas

de la noche oscura y azul.

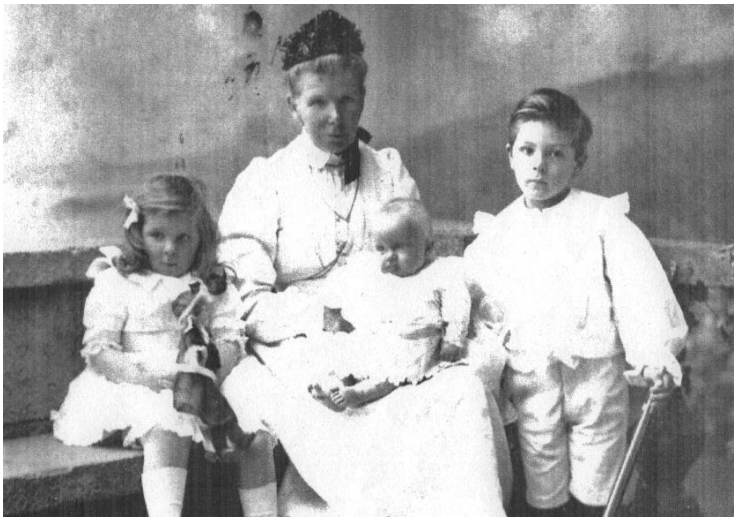
[14] Del latín *vale* `consérvate sano´: adiós o despedida. Leighton recibió una sólida formación en lenguas clásicas durante sus estudios de secundaria en Uppingham. Allí obtuvo, entre otros premios, numerosas menciones de composición griega y latina. Fue nombrado "Captain in Classics" en su graduación, en julio de 1914.

APPENDIX

II

Robert Leighton, Roland´s father

Marie Connor Leighton, Roland´s mother



From left to right: Clare, Evelyn and Roland Leighton with their nanny around 1900

Roland Leighton around 1914

Vera Brittain in 1914

Edward Brittain, Roland Leighton and Victor Richardson,

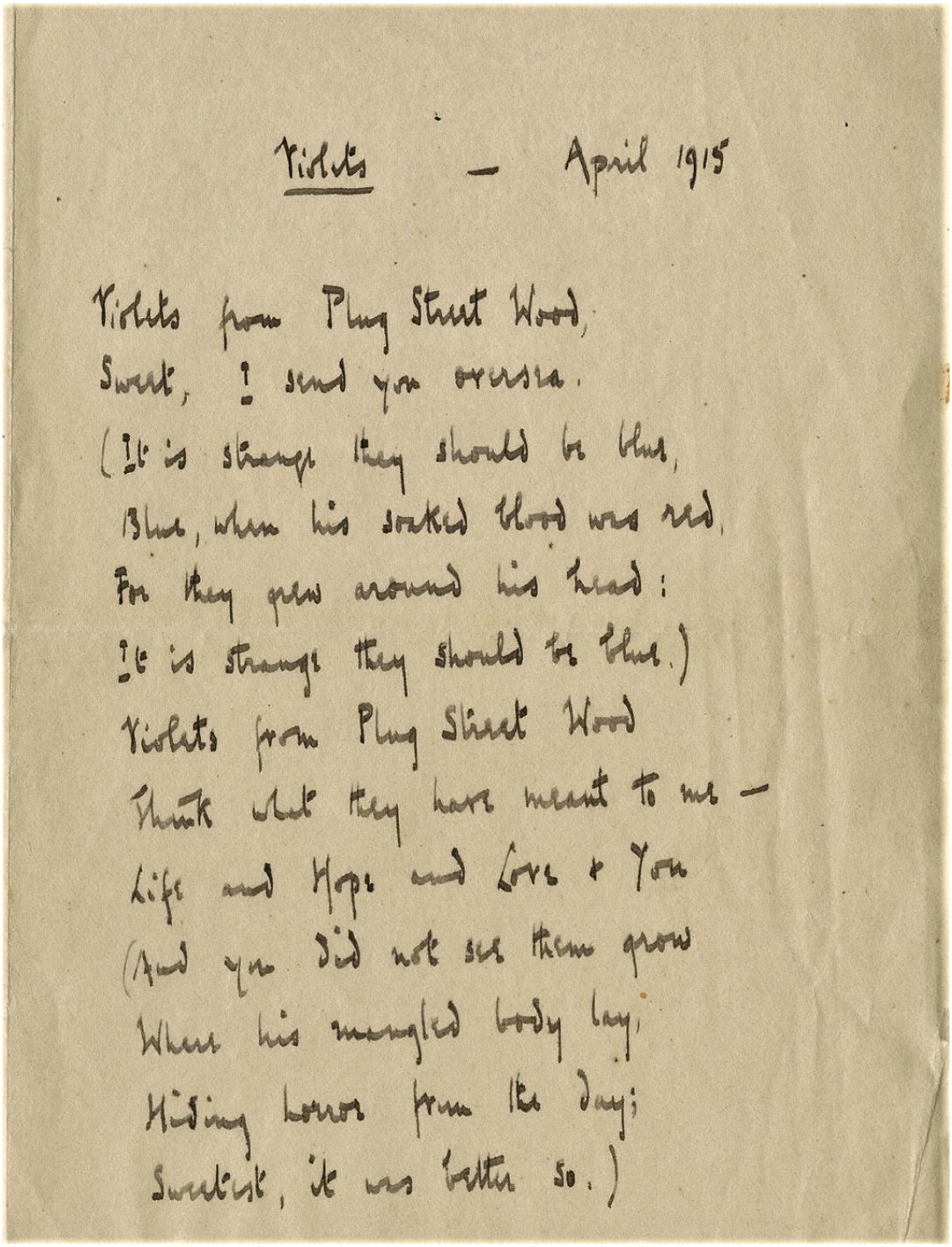
Uppingham School OTC camp, 1914

Roland Leighton drilling his platoon,

Peterborough, 1915

Roland Leighton in uniform, 1915

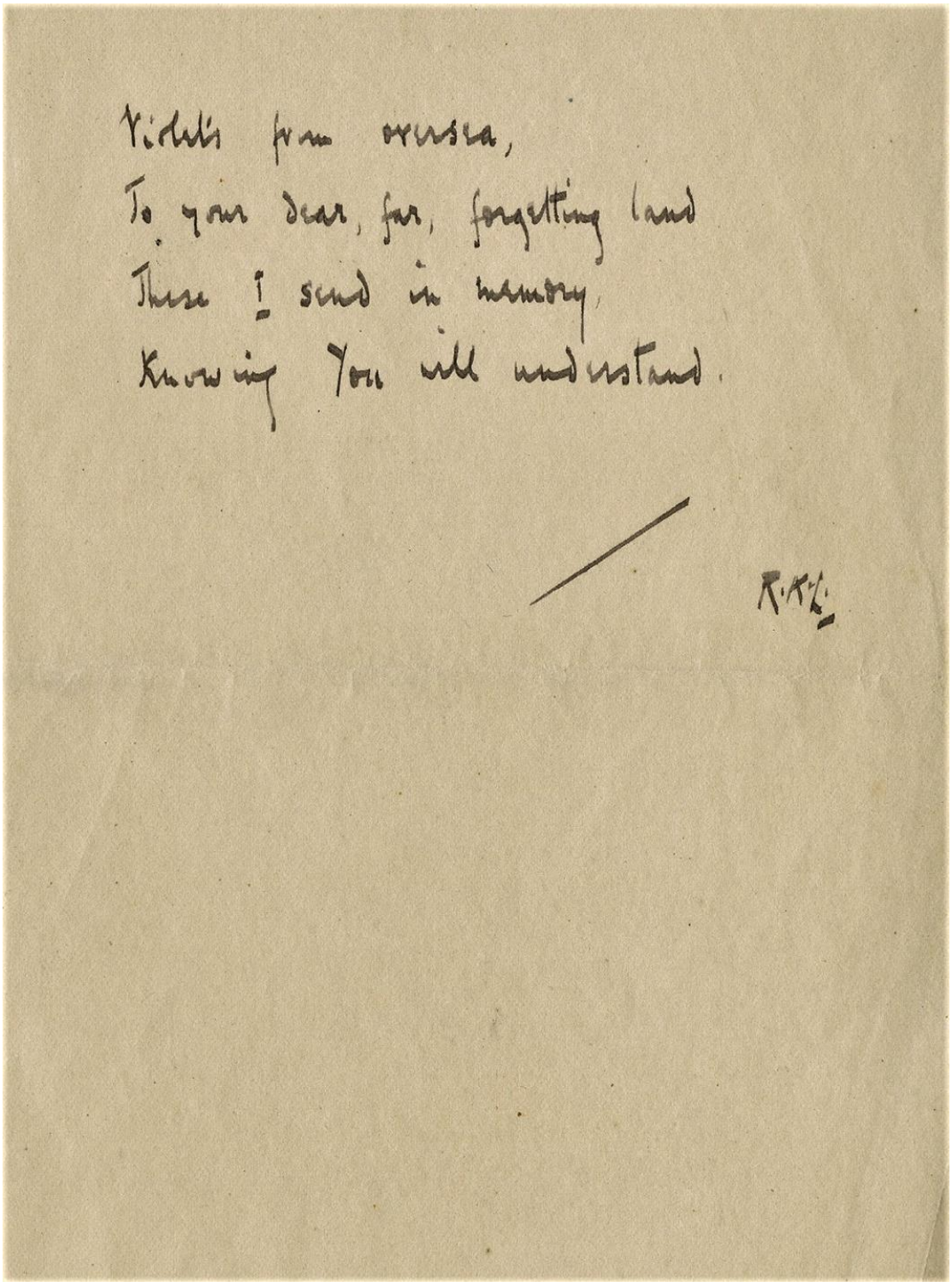
Ploegsteert Wood, 1915. From a photograph by Roland Leighton.



Violets — April 1915

Violets from Plug Street Wood,
Sweet, I send you overseas.
(It is strange they should be blue,
Blue, when his soaked blood was red,
For they grew around his head:
It is strange they should be blue.)
Violets from Plug Street Wood
Think what they have meant to me —
Life and Hope and Love & You
(And you did not see them grow
Where his mangled body lay,
Hiding horror from the day;
Sweetest, it was better so.)

(I) Manuscript of Leighton´s poem “Violets”, sent to Vera in August 1915.



(II) Manuscript of Leighton´s poem “Violets”, sent to Vera in August 1915.